Peter A. Bien
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
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Transcribed by Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft

[PATRICK A.]
DELLINGER: This is Patrick [A.] Dellinger. It is Wednesday, June 1st, at about 10:20 a.m. I'm here in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth with Professor Peter [A.] Bien [pronounced like BEAN].

Thank you for being here, Professor.

BIEN: I'm happy to be here. Thank you.

DELLINGER: So I'd like to start from the beginning. Can you tell me where and when you were born?

BIEN: [Chuckles.] Yes! May 28th (I just had my birthday), 1930, so I'm 86. And I was born in Sunnyside, Queens, New York City.

Did it collapse? [Referring to a sound.] No.

DELLINGER: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

BIEN: One sister, unfortunately died of cancer four years ago. Younger sister.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And your parents?

BIEN: They're not living now.

DELLINGER: Oh, no, but their names and—

BIEN: My father was Dr. Adolph Frederick Bien, a pediatrician; my mother, Harriet [Honigsberg Bien].

DELLINGER: And what did they do for a living?

BIEN: My father was a—a physician, a pediatrician, and my mother was a teacher who became a house- —housemaker, homemaker, I guess you'd call her,—

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: —but was very active in various ways: docent in the Metropolitan Museum [of Art] and so forth. [Transcriber's note: Throughout, Professor Bien pronounces "very" as "veddy."]

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And did you grow up in New York, then?

BIEN: Until I was 17, and then I returned to New York as a Ph.D. student at Columbia University.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: Those are my two times in New York,—

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: —which is a marvelous city to live in.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. So what kind of—what kind of things were you interested in as a young person, as a middle schooler, as a high schooler?

BIEN: Mostly playing tennis.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. Big tennis player.

BIEN: [Chuckles.] Yes. And music. I was a piano student and very interested in music, classical music. My mother took me from, oh, probably age six, seven, eight—I don't know—to—year after year to the entire series of the New York Philharmonic Children's Concerts [sic; New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts] in Carnegie Hall, and that was a wonderful education.

And we went—later, I would go, I remember, mostly with my father—we heard---every time [Vladimir] Horowitz played in Carnegie Hall, we went. We went to here Arthur Rubinstein play outdoors in City College [of New York] football stadium or something. We had many, many tickets to Arturo Toscanini leading the New York City or—no, it was the radio station orchestra, because I had an uncle who worked for

the station, and we could get in. And so that there was a lot of music in our life, the family and especially me. Plus tennis.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And were your parents political at all?

BIEN: Not very active politically, but they were liberal. They were great enthusiasts for [President] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, because they—they lived through the [Great] Depression, and they saw what he did and what [President Herbert C.] Hoover would not have done—you know, having a different, non-Keynesian [after John Maynard Keynes] economic theory.

And I do remember I often saw Roosevelt because when he traveled to New York, he would fly into LaGuardia Field [New York Municipal Airport–LaGuardia Field, now LaGuardia Airport], which wasn't too far from us. I—I used to go there on a bicycle and watch the—the Pan American [World Airways] Clippers come down on the water, which was very exciting.

But he would then travel by limousine, open limousine in those days, on Queens Boulevard [in Queens, New York City, New York] into Manhattan, and we would go up the street, because we were three blocks from there, and wave. And when Roosevelt died, I remember both my parents with huge tears coming down their cheeks. So that tells you something.

DELLINGER: Mmm. Mm-hm.

And how was your high school experience?

BIEN: [Sighs.] [Chuckles.] The part I remember, I went to the Bronx High School of Science, which is one of the three or four "special" schools in New York City that one has to be examined to get into and selected and so forth. A very good school. But I wasn't interested in science. [Chuckles.] It was a slight problem. So what I remember most about that school was playing tennis on the tennis team,—

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: —which I was very active in doing. And, of course, it was in New York City, so one had all the advantages of being there. But then the best thing that ever happened, or one of the best things that ever happened was somehow, for some reason, maybe because it was clear I wasn't interested in science, my father applied to Deerfield Academy, and I was accepted, and I finished high school at Deerfield Academy. And that was transformative because I discovered a wonderful master, they were called, a teacher, Richard Warren Hatch, who was a novelist and a professor or teacher of English. And we became great friends, and I did all kinds of good writing and literary stuff at Deerfield. So all of a sudden, you know, it was clear where I was headed, and Deerfield was responsible for that. And thank goodness.

DELLINGER: And how did you decide where to go to college?

BIEN: I did not decide. [Laughs.] Those days, things were so unfair compared to today. From Deerfield Academy, the headmaster decided where you would go. I never even applied. And he told me, "Peter, I think we'll send you to Harvard [University]." I never applied to Harvard. Can you believe it? Harvard would come to the—the famous headmaster, Frank [L.] Boyden, and say, "Well, how many are you sending this year? Well, who are they?" So there were five or six of us. And I went to Harvard. And that was fine. I didn't mind. [Chuckles.]

But there's more to that story, because although I had wonderful courses, they were all very large—you know, 200 students and this sort of thing—the professors were bigger than life, you know. You dared not talk to them and so forth, at least not as freshmen or sophomores. And—and I felt a great lack in Harvard, mostly religiously, and did an extraordinary thing. At the end of the sophomore year, I transferred, not because I was failing. I got very good grades. But I just wanted a different experience.

And I went to the Quaker college called Haverford [College] in Pennsylvania, which was very, very small. I think they had 400 students when I was there, if you can believe it. And it was wonderful. It was a very good thing in my life, too. So I had two at Harvard, two at Haverford, and then Columbia graduate school.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

So—

BIEN: And I should add a year at University of Bristol in England, which was when I was doing my dissertation.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. How was your experience at Haverford different than that at Harvard?

BIEN: Well, look, Harvard is like Dartmouth. It's filled with wealthy people, with business people, with people going into business, with people going into the stock market, entrepreneurs and, of course, very, very talen- —very, very smart people. There's no question. And Haverford is totally different. Its graduates do not go into Wall Street. Its graduates do not typically go into business. They go into social work, teaching, medicine, to be sure, ministry. In other words, they're more concerned with society and the good of society and so forth.

And there's a very different atmosphere there. For example, I talked to you previously about work camps. Well, at Haverford, almost every weekend, I went to what was called the Philadelphia Weekend Work Camp. There was a wonderful man called [David S.] "Dave" Richie, who ran it. And we would go into the slums of Philadelphia, which were many, and help to fix up houses which were being abandoned, you might say, by their landlords. We painted. The main thing was fixing windows, which either had broken glass or, you know, they wouldn't go up and down; the ropes were broken and so forth. And we did all that.

And then had a—we were a group, of course, of young people. Occasionally, the young people who lived in these houses, who would be black always, would join us, and in the evenings we talked about everything and had fellowship. And that was something that never happened at Harvard, although it probably could in some small part of Harvard.

But the other thing was that every class was taught by a professor who you could get to know, be invited home, eat with—know in other ways, and the classes were small.

Papers were marked by the professor because at Haverford there are no graduate students, whereas at Harvard all the papers were marked by graduate students. And the large classes were broken into what were called sections. The sections were run by graduate students.

And in my experience—and it's not everybody's experience—my daughter went to Harvard and had a much better experience. But the—the sections that I had of the graduate students who ran them were very poor because the graduate students were not interested. They did it because they were earning some money. They had to, and so forth, and they would—instead of helping us and guiding us through the material of the course, very often used us to do certain research for their own dissertations, so that in a way they misused us in—in the section. And that was—there was one great exception of a wonderful section leader, but the others—the great—the majority, in my particular case, were the other type I just described. And that was one of the problems, which never happened at Haverford or any small college.

DELLINGER: Hmm.

BIEN: And in fact, one of the luminaries of Harvard, William Ernest Hocking, a famous philosopher, had retired the year before I went, and people said, "Oh, you're a year too late. You won't have Hocking." And there were many other good philosophy courses and teachers, but there was no Hocking.

When I went to Haverford two years later, the first thing I saw was a sign, "We're happy to announce that Harvard retired professor, William Ernest Hocking, is a visitor at Haverford and will be offering his famous course," dah, dah, dah. There were 20 students. He marked my papers, everybody's papers. And one paper—I don't have a full memory of this, but I think I remember something. I must—I think I dared to say that I felt he was wrong. (Can you imagine?) And he gave the paper an A and invited me to supper. That's what happened at Haverford.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. So Haverford is a Quaker school,—

BIEN: Yes.

DELLINGER: —as I understand, right?

BIEN: Yes. Haverford and Swarthmore [College] are close, in greater Philadelphia.

DELLINGER: Mmm. So what kind of effect did that have on you?

BIEN: A very great one because I was taking under the wing of the professor of philosopher there, who was called Douglas [V.] Steere, who became, you know, the sort of, I don't know, best-known Quaker academic, at any rate, of the time, succeeding an even more famous one called Rufus [M.] Jones, who had retired. I think had died also by that time, which was 1950.

And Douglas Steere and I and a group spent a lot of time together and—and we got—again, in the home and got to know his wife as well, and he was very, very astute. He was one of the first people that was teaching courses in [Søren A.] Kierkegaard, and I did that. He was—he was the first one to translate one of Kierkegaard's books. Then somebody else did all the rest, but he learned Danish. He had German and English, so if you have German and English, learning Danish is not a great, great problem, but he learned it. He did that, and he translated the book. And, of course, he was very authoritative on Quakerism. He also was in the World Council of Churches and visited the Pope and all things that important people do, you might say. And he was just a very good man.

And I'm happy to say that my son, second son, Alec [Bien], who's a 1980 graduate of Haverford, also is very close to Douglas Steere and his wife, Dorothy [MacEachron Steere] ("Dot"). And that means going home, having dinners, et cetera, et cetera, not only in the classroom. That's the way things worked.

So he was my guide, you might say, into Quakerism.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And at that point, what did Quakerism mean to you?

BIEN: It meant—well, I really sort of repeat what I already said. It meant working broadly to help the world be a better place,

instead of going out and devoting oneself to making money and getting power.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: And that was very different from Harvard. I hate to say it, because Harvard is wonderful, too. And I said my daughter had a very good experience there, and I went later, much later, as a visiting professor in 1983 and had a wonderful experience. But still, there is that difference, and you're a graduate —will be a graduate of Dartmouth, and you should know about such things.

No, Haverford—the whole emphasis was different. We went—I told you about the work camps. We went also out to the local hospital. I was changing bed pans and—and things like that at a hospital. That's what people did at Haverford. Everybody. And it wasn't just a few people like here in the [William Jewett] Tucker Foundation, which is very good and does service a lot, but it's not central. At Haverford, that sort of activity, you might say, of charitable work, whatever you want to call it, was more central.

DELLINGER: So you graduated from Haverford—

BIEN: Yes.

DELLINGER: —in 1952?

BIEN: Yes.

DELLINGER: With a degree in?

BIEN: I had a degree in music, as it turned out.

DELLINGER: Music.

BIEN: Yeah.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And what did you do after that?

BIEN: I went two weeks later to a wonderful Quaker study center not too far from Haverford, called Pendle Hill, which I'd been involved with very intimately ever since, as a trustee and

teacher and student. I went two weeks later to be trained to go to an international work camp, so three weeks or four weeks later, I was on a boat on—it was a very small boat. It took ten days. It was still something that had been used for troops, and we were in hammocks with triple layers and so forth. Ten days. We went to Holland, to Rotterdam, which was still unreconstructed from being very severely bombed by the Germans, because Rotterdam is a leading port, you know?

And we went to a work camp in Holland, not in the big cities but in a village, and it was devoted to Down's syndrome people. The people—the Dutch people who ran it were called theosophists, which meant they were followers of the philosophy of Rudolf [J. L.] Steiner. And they believed in reincarnation. And it worked in this setting because the Down's syndrome people, who are limited, don't live too much after 40 or 45 years, and cannot do—hold jobs or anything. But they—they treated them so well, and they trained them so well to have 100 of their *possible* capacity, right? Because they figured that these people would be reincarnated, maybe as normal, and we—in other words, the staff—could very well be reincarnated as Down's syndrome, so let's help them,—

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: —because we probably might want to be helped in another life. Well, it sounds a little far-fetched, but it worked, and they did a beautiful job. They did a lot with music, training them to play recorders together, through counting time and keeping to the music. They made their own beds and did little jobs and so forth. And we—the work camp people, which was very international—it was a marvelous experience for me—I was the only American in it—we relieved the staff of the other duties that would have taken them away. In other words, we mowed the grass, and we cut the trees and collected the garbage and sort of kept the place in good order so they could work with the Down's syndrome people.

And—and I made some very good friends—one Italian woman—we traveled together in—in England, and then especially a young man, a Dutch young man that I then went

and lived in his house afterwards. And so, I spent almost a year there. And then I got drafted.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And what did you do when you got drafted?

BIEN: Well, they—I got a notice, something like the form that I gave you, and they said, “You are illegally out of the United States. You weren’t supposed to leave without the permission because you’re a draftable age. You better get home fast.” So, I got home fast, and I applied for CO [conscientious objector] status. And that’s a process, so—first of all, a lot of time is delayed and so forth, and then it’s always denied, almost [chuckles], except maybe in [the] Philadelphia area, where they’re most used to it.

And then you go to an appeal, and I went to an appeal with—there’s a gentleman who was—I don’t know anything about him. He may have been a judge. And I went with—we were going to the Community Church [of New York] in Manhattan, and I went with the minister, who was named [Donald S.] Harrington, as my support, you might say. And I was granted the—thank goodness.

And then one had to do what was called alternative military service. It was a good system. Same length, two years. And they—they specified what sort of things it could be. You were not allowed to do it near your parental home; you had to go out somewheres. And I was assigned finally to a hospital in Rochester, New York, as an orderly. And it so happened I was an orderly in the operation—in the OR, so I was wheeling people in, wheeling people out. If they cut somebody’s leg off, they gave it to me to remove, and so forth.

And literally only two weeks later, the head nurse said to me, “Look, we know you’re gonna—we’ll have you for two years”—which is rare for orderlies; they come and go, you know? “And we’re desperately in need of surgical technicians, so do you mind if we train you?” So I was given a very rudimentary training and thrown into the operating room as a surgical technician, which means scrubbing—you stand next to the surgeon, and when he calls for a particular instrument, scalpel, Kelly [clamp], whatever, you hope you give him the right one.

You count the number of towels going into the patient's abdomen, and you try to make sure that the same number come out. You take little needles and thread them with sutures so they're ready for the surgeon, or sometimes I would sew people up, et cetera. It was scary. But, you know, you get used to it. I did probably thousands of operations, sometimes four in the morning for emergencies. And that's how I spent the Korean War.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

So going back to your CO status, I know later you were going to—to work with some of the organizations that helped people, trained people to try to get CO status. Were you in contact with any of those organizations then?

BIEN: No, because I was in the operating room.

DELLINGER: When you were getting your—your CO status.

BIEN: Oh, before.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: In the process.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: It's—you know, I don't have a very good memory—the sort of things that I told you happened here at Dartmouth in the Vietnam period were different, and I—I did what I told you: I went to the appeal judge. I went with a very good support...I had certainly—because I saw Reverend Harrington every week, had talked to him about it, and he was supportive. So in a—in a sense, he helped me in—in maybe my presentation, what I would say.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: For example, I'll tell you one thing that I do remember. It's typical. They'll ask always an applicant—because you're—you know, you're very protected if you're a CO. You're not going to get killed, most likely, although some COs served in

dangerous areas in the Second World War and so forth. And they would typically ask, “Do you look down on people who serve in the military? Are they mistaken? Are they immoral or anything like that?” And, of course, the answer is no. Heavens, they’re putting their lives on the line. But there has to be somebody who says that we must stop having wars. So that’s one of the things that happened.

I don’t think I was doing the sorts of things that you are now familiar with. That came through the problem here at Dartmouth later.

DELLINGER: So after your time as an orderly, what did you do next?

BIEN: I had been called back, remember, from Europe.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: And what I wanted—it was two full years to the day, and when I was discharged, I just wanted to get back to Europe, and I mentioned this Pendle Hill, the Quaker center in Philadelphia. Well, I went to the equivalent Quaker center, which was—preceded—it was founded in 1903—Pendle Hill in 1930, I believe - in Birmingham, just outside of Birmingham, England. It was the former mansion of George Cadbury, the Cadbury of the chocolate company. And the chocolate company was in the model village that he built, called Bournville, which was a mile away, and when the wind blew in the right direction, you had the delicious chocolate flavor. And it’s a wonderful place for study and community and concentration and meditation.

And what happened is I met a very wonderful woman, my future wife. And so, everything changed. She was—had come from Greece to Birmingham, and there was a big, long story about that, too. And when she returned—I sort of got there in—you know, in winter term. It was January or something. When she went back home in June, I was doing some research, actually, in Paris, and eventually joined her family in Thessaloniki, Greece, and we were married in August. So things happened.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And what was your purpose of going to Birmingham? Were you there to study? Were you there to—to work at a work camp?

BIEN: No. I was there to sort of resume what had been interrupted, and that was to sort of determine the path of my life. And I was thinking—it wasn't totally crazy. I was thinking of going to the Oriental Institute in—in London and studying about nonviolence as practiced by Mahatma Gandhi. And that—the place to do that was London. So I went—you know, it was mid-year. You don't start these things till September. So here—it was mid- —you know, I went from January—then two years later January I was released, and I had interim, right?—from, say, January to the following September, let's say, if I were to do that. And so I—I wanted a place that would be compatible religiously and academically as this place was. The name is Woodbrooke, Woodbrooke College [sic; Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre]. And—so that's why.

And that all changed because I went to Greece and got married, soon had the pregnant wife, and I—then we—we decided we best—my father, remember, is a pediatrician, and he said, "Well, listen, I think it would be nice to have the baby here, and one of our good obstetrician friends will take care of you," et cetera.

So we came back to New York, and I entered Columbia University, which one could do in January, in mid—mid year, the following year, as a student in comparative literature, English and comparative literature. And that was a very good doctoral program.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: So that—it—things changed.

DELLINGER: So at this point, I mean, you're thinking about studying nonviolence, you've become a conscientious objector,—

BIEN: Right, right.

DELLINGER: —you're extremely interested in this—in this idea of nonviolence—

BIEN: Yes.

DELLINGER: —and—and this antiwar sentiment. Was that entirely your Quakerism? How did this—how did this whole [cross-talk; unintelligible; 34:09]?

BIEN: Well, it really started before the Quakerism. It might—you might—I might do it in reverse. The pacifism, if you want to call that—use that word, was maybe the main thing that led me to Quakerism, rather than reverse. The Quaker church is a peace church. The official view is pacifistic. And that was very appealing to me. And then there was all the rest as well.

So when I—but I had—when—I have not emphasized what I should have, because I spoke about my interest in tennis and in music, right? But I didn't say always in literature and in—and in words and working with language, always. And the reason I majored—I majored in that at Harvard. You know, you start as a sophomore early in Harvard. And I started at Haverford majoring in English, but I found a wonderful professor of music, and not such a wonderful professor of English. [Chuckles.] And I said, *Listen, what—what makes sense in a university is to find an inspiring professor,* and so that was music. So I did everything in the final year - was crazy. And I managed.

But the—the interest in literature was always there. So I went back to Columbia—so I went to Columbia, in literature. And then, being connected with Greece in this wonderful way, not as a tourist but as part of a family and a very remarkable family, the first thing was I became interested in Greek literature and [Nikos] Kazantzakis, and I decided to translate books that were antiwar. So you see the connection.

So my—three or four of my translations of Kazantzakis novels and also a marvel novel by a man called [Stratis] Myrivilis are antiwar novels.

DELLINGER: So it is through your study of literature that you were really exposed to pacifism.

BIEN: Well, there's—there's more, but it continued through the study of literature, yeah, and was expressed through the activism of these translations. And then when I got a job at Dartmouth, which came after the completion of the doctorate and a year in England (I've mentioned earlier), then things happened. I came in '61, and '69 the place blew up because of war. And I was in the Quaker meeting, and I was clerk. "clerk" means "chair," you know, in Quaker talk. We don't hire ministers, but we have a structure. And I was clerk of the meeting in the war period. And the meeting was pacifist.

DELLINGER: So you graduated from Columbia I '61.

BIEN: Sixty-one, I guess yeah.

DELLINGER: What made you want to come to Dartmouth?

BIEN: I didn't want to come to Dartmouth. [Chuckles.] Dartmouth wanted *me* to come. It was just a pure accident, like some other things. I was at Columbia. They were, you know, supportive. "Well, where are you interviewing?" dah, dah, dah. And I had an interview or two. Nothing attracted me very much.

And then suddenly the chair of the department said, "Well, there's somebody here from Dartmouth. Could you speak with him?" And that was the dean of faculty, Mr. [Arthur E.] Jensen, and he said, "Well, how about visiting?" So I came up, and you go through a routine. You meet people in English. As it turned out, they see if you're civilized. They take you to the Hanover Inn and see if you eat with a knife and fork, you know?

And then you go home and you wait and wait and wait. And a very funny thing happened. The chairman of the department, who was called John [W.] Finch at that time, called. I was out—I was—I was still living at Columbia, you know, because I hadn't left yet. And my wife answered the phone, and he said, "I'd like to speak to Dr. Bien." My father is a physician, right? So my wife said, "Well, Dr. Bien doesn't live here, but he comes every Thursday, driven by his chauffeur." [Chuckles.] This was my father. My father was—had very—was not blind but too—too blind to drive, so he had a chauffeur.

So, what's going on? That could have been the end of my career at Dartmouth. He thought, you know, "Dr." being Ph.D. But the doctor was the physician. Well, they straightened that out finally, and they said that "we're pleased to offer Dr. Peter Bien a job." So I didn't choose Dartmouth.

And the first thing when that wonderful offer came, we—we had—since 1950 I've owned land in the Adirondacks [Adirondack Mountains], and I've been there since I was 11 years old. And the first thing we did was to look at the map: How far is Dartmouth from the Hudson River where we were? it's the other river, you know? The Connecticut [River] and the next is Hudson [River]. And it was three hours, and we said, "Okay, let's go."

DELLINGER: Wow. So when you first came to Dartmouth, how would you describe the makeup of the faculty?

BIEN: [Chuckles.] They were all men. You realize that? There were *no* women. There was one—in the *whole* greater Dartmouth situation, there was one woman faculty member in the medical school. So that's number one.

Number two, it had begun to change a little bit, but a huge percentage of Dartmouth faculty were Dartmouth graduates. In other words, they recruited Dartmouth people. And at one point, practically everybody was like that. President [John Sloan] Dickey, who, you know, had a long tenure, 20-odd years or more, had begun to try to change that, but there was still that feeling that it was all sort of ingrown.

And, like anywhere else, there were very, very good people and people not so good. But it was—I was treated very well. I have no complaints.

And one of the nicest things for me was that Dartmouth not only had the English Department but had Comparative Literature, and when I came Comparative Literature was a department. It had two professors, and they decided to abolish the department, as a way of getting rid of the—of the professors, because they—they had tenure. That happened, so there was nothing.

And about five years, five or six years later, there were some—new people came, and the reinvented it as a program, which means they don't hire their own professors; they borrow from other—and it was a great advantage for me because I was teaching. I wanted to teach some of the Greek things. Would have to do it in English, of course. And other modernist novels of Thomas Mann or [Marcel] Proust or [Franz] Kafka, whatever. And that all could be done in—in Comp Lit. And I was chair of Comp Lit three times.

So I traveled between the English Department and Comp Lit, with a little bit of classics, and was involved in lots of committees and so forth. It was a very good place to be for me, and for the family. Very nice place to raise children, and the schools were good, and living here was very pleasant.

DELLINGER: How would you describe the political makeup of the faculty?

BIEN: I thought you were going to ask of the students. I think when we came, it was mostly center right. It's probably moved center left now. I'm not sure. But we had, of course,*The Dartmouth Review*, which at one point was very visible, and every- —you had *The Review*, and you had [*Mailbox*? 44:53] every week—every month or whenever it came out. And the students were very active. I had one or two in class. And that was not good. They did—they were mean and injured people and so forth.

But several things are very important. One: We have the Orozco murals [*The Epic of American Civilization*, by José Clemente Orozco], and the miracle is that we have them. They were not destroyed. I don't know if you know that story, but the—you have to compare it with what happened in Rockefeller Center in New York City. Do you know anything about that?

DELLINGER: I don't think so.

BIEN: Well, there were two great Mexican mural pain- —muralists, Orozco and [Diego] Riviera [sic; Rivera], was the other. Riviera [sic; Rivera] was even better known. And he was commissioned around—after the Depression—you know, sort of the same time as—these things were built—Sanborn

[House] and Baker [Fisher Ames Baker Memorial Library, now Baker-Berry Library] 1928, ’29. And the Rockefeller Center, maybe ’30 or something like that, ’31. And they commissioned Riviera [sic; Rivera] to do a huge mural in the main building at Rockefeller Center. And he did it. And they loved it. It was marvelous!

Until they noticed, way down at one part, was the portrait of Vladimir Lenin, and with other leaders, I guess. And our graduate, Nelson [A.] Rockefeller [Class of 1930], wrote him a letter, and I’ve seen the letter. It was distributed in New York at one point. And it’s very, you know, respectful. “Dear Sir, We love your painting. It’s a work of genius. And we’re so proud to have it. However, we cannot have the portrait of Lenin in Rockefeller Center. So it’s very simple: If you would just remove that, everything else stays, and it’s a great—great result.”

Riviera [sic; Rivera] refused. They removed the entire mural, painted over it or whatever. It’s not there. We did not. The Orozco mural—I hope you know it—it’s totally communist. And we kept it. It’s—it’s more than a portrait of Lenin [chuckles], in a way. And that tells you something about Dartmouth. It has to. About the particular people in charge then. And it must have been President [Ernest M.] Hopkins [Class of 1901] and the art people and so forth. So that’s—that’s good.

DELLINGER: Did you—

BIEN: And then—I’m sorry. Can I continue a little bit?

DELLINGER: Yes, go ahead.

BIEN: In the [unintelligible; 48:34] period, we had—and before that—we had four ROTCs [Reserve Officers’ Training Corps]: [U.S.] Army, [U.S.] Navy, [U.S.] Air Force—what would the fourth be? I don’t know. Marines [U.S. Marine Corps] or [U.S.] Coast Guard. I think I’m right, four. Let’s say three—three or four. And they were in—very active. We had drill Wednesday afternoon. There were no classes, and they all marched on the [Dartmouth] Green and so forth.

Well, every one of them left, which tells you something about Dartmouth. We were against the war. And it wasn't just—it wasn't everybody, of course, but the general atmosphere here in 1969, '70, '71 must have been such that these ROTC people felt uncomfortable and chose to leave. And, you know, there were people on both sides, obviously, but that's—it's a fact. They're gone.

Then we—we—with President [David T.] McLaughlin [Class of 1954, Tuck 1955]—I can't give the exact dates, but it was after. It was, you know, a while after. He was very eager to bring back Navy ROTC as being the best in some way, and it's advantageous for the college in many ways. And it had to go through the faculty because ROTC had faculty who were part of the Dartmouth faculty, right?

I was on the decisive committee. I think we were about 12 people on the committee. Eleven of us were opposed. One was for. So we went to the full faculty and recommended denying the president's request. Faculty voted with us. The request was denied. Well, it tells you something about Dartmouth.

The president—this is McLaughlin still—then did something very fancy, which angered a lot of people. He was successful in bringing in the Army in a smaller program because all the classes would be somewhere else, and the faculty would not be part of our faculty. And we still have that. So that's that story. But we, as a full faculty, voted against bringing back naval ROTC.

DELLINGER: And that was in the early '70s.

BIEN: It's the presidency of McLaughlin, so you can figure out what it was, yeah.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

So going back to—to the early, mid-'60s, do you feel like there was a lot of faculty members that agreed with you in your nonviolent, pacifist stance?

BIEN: There were some. No, not everybody. I mean, why should there be? There were people here who had served in the

military, whose parents had, et cetera, et cetera, and who felt patriotic and that they had sacrificed, and their children could sacrifice and so forth, and we had to respect that.

There were others. There were other—the Quakers were pretty solidly with us, and even Quakerism in the Second World War, where the evil, being [Adolf] Hitler and so forth, seemed so unmistakable, undebatable, you know, that some Quakers chose to enlist and go in the Army or Navy. And we did not read them out of meeting or anything like that, so we—we respected that. With Vietnam, it was not like that. They were—we were pretty clearly pacifists. At least that's my memory.

The full faculty would have been very diverse. You know, some would be supportive; others would be vituperative. You know, you have all kinds. Which is good. Yeah.

DELLINGER: So, the makeup of the students: obviously all male, but what was their political opinions? At least in your sense of it.

BIEN: Well, many of the students—some of the students already in ROTCs—I remember one that I was close to, [Peter C.] Sorlien [pronounced sohr-LEEN, Class of 1971] his name was. Very nice person. He stood up in the Green, dressed beautifully in his uniform, and tore it apart, tore the buttons off and so forth. And that's the way he left the program. So there were others that agreed with him, others that stayed and so forth.

When—look, the best example of this is at the moment of the takeover of Parkhurst [Hall], which you know about and are interested in, right?

DELLINGER: Mmm.

BIEN: So, they're in Parkhurst Hall. The doors are locked. They carry the president out. And the dean, I think. Laid them on the grass, right? Yeah. And while all that was happening, another group of students were playing baseball on the Green. So, you know, that's life.

DELLINGER: So when you came to Hanover, did you immediately find a Quaker group to—

BIEN: Oh, yes.

DELLINGER: —to be a part of?

BIEN: Absolutely. Yeah. We have a good—it wasn't very big or old. It was founded—we came in '61. I think the meeting—and this is typical of—of meetings in universities—it was a sort of a growth of university Quaker meetings, with a lot of academics in them. It—we have some records of that. It was probably started maybe four or five years before I arrived, 1956 or '7. The people who started it left, actually.

And the very first day we arrived was a Sunday, or Saturday night maybe. And we went to the meeting. And it was wonderful. It was a very nice group. So—and the meeting grew. It's a very healthy, strong meeting, I would say. And one of its most attractive parts for me, which will sound strange, I suppose, is that it has very few Dartmouth people. In other words, it's one chance, because Dartmouth is a kind of a ghetto—a nice ghetto—you know, you—you see faculty, and they always talk [chuckles] about the same things and so forth and are doing the same thing that you're doing, so—

But the meeting had farmers, doctors, dentists, social workers, unemployed [chuckles], et cetera. Everybody. And from about a 30-mile or 40-mile radius in all directions. And still does. So it was a very nice diversity that got us out of the Dartmouth ghetto and enabled us to meet other people. And still does.

DELLINGER: So throughout the early part of the Vietnam War, did you have a sense at all of students reacting to it?

BIEN: I think it all started in 1968 with the big reaction in Paris, and that spread. And it was everywhere, in all campuses. And minimally here compared to [University of California,] Berkeley, Columbia and probably others I should mention and don't know. So, it grew. I don't know, '69 in the spring is when it erupted, all right? But remember, the Paris business was a year—it was '68. It was at least a year before. And I'm sure already there was a lot in Berkeley, as one place, and Columbia was very affected.

We were doing what I told you previously when we met another time, that we had students coming for draft counseling. We, ourselves, trained ourselves in draft counseling. Some of the materials are here for that. And that had begun before spring term of ’69, of course.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm. And this was all related to SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], correct?

BIEN: I believe so.

DELLINGER: In your opinion.

BIEN: It seemed that SDS was leading this, and I do—I told you when we talked a month ago, whatever—there was—the leader of SDS, a student, seemed to me a despot, you know, even though in a way I was sort of on his side concerning the war, but you could see this somebody was manipulating people.

And I think a lot of—some of—I won’t say a lot—some of the students in the building hardly knew why they were there, and I had kind of a—almost a—sort of a funny example of that. I always served as freshman adviser. And, you know, in the fall term it’s beautiful here, and here are three, four, five freshman advisees from God knows where, Montana, Oregon and so forth. And we had—we had them at home, and we had dinner, and I took them apple picking. You know, it was nice. And oriented them in ways that were needed.

So now the spring term, one or two of them are in the building. And the parents, who had delivered them to us in September, said, “What? What have you done?” “What have *I* done?” “You were supposed to protect our children, be their welcome, and they’re”—by this time they were in jail, you know? Of course, I had hardly seen them after the freshman advising period. And I think they hardly knew what they were doing, these—these youngsters.

Others, like the SDS people, were very, very knowledgeable, what they were doing. But if you read at all the big piece of writing that I gave you, you will see my—because I went in the building, several times, when they were still in, being

threatened, but decided not to leave, right? And the—the—the—I told you this when we spoke earlier. The—Dickey—President [John S.] Dickey [Class of 1929] and the other officials, including the governor, who is an ex officio Dartmouth trustee, were very good in trying to handle this peacefully and without fanfare.

Anyway, when I went in, I was very proud of them, and I tried to explain it in this piece of writing what—their form of democracy. It was not the SDS demagogue or [Benito] Mussolini type or anything. They had multiple leaders. The whole idea was: Let's keep changing leadership, which was very interesting. And there were—everything—many other things that I—I tried to explain there. And I felt of these students, who were, you know, the age of college students, that they were suddenly totally mature people in that situation, the best of them. So that's part of it, anyway, which I—I felt important enough to distribute it in the way you know by this piece of writing, based on certain other theories.

DELLINGER: So this piece of writing that Professor Bien is referring to is—what would you call it, an essay?

BIEN: An essay.

DELLINGER: A paper? An article?

BIEN: An essay, yeah.

DELLINGER: An essay that he wrote after the Parkhurst incident.

BIEN: Well, maybe even during it—during the—

DELLINGER: Possibly during.

BIEN: —during the term, yeah, because what's the date there?

DELLINGER: May 8th.

BIEN: May. Yeah. Well, it was finished by—still the troubles—they were out of Parkhurst, of course. They were in jail.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: Yeah.

DELLINGER: But where he relates what happened in Parkhurst—

BIEN: Yes.

DELLINGER: —to your study of literature,—

BIEN: Yes. And philosophy.

DELLINGER: And philosophy as well.

BIEN: Yeah.

DELLINGER: And you distributed those to—this title here—to all members of the Dartmouth community with a little note at the top. So what really prompted you to write and distribute this? What was—

BIEN: I'm a writer.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: I'm always writing something. And that—and it was my [chuckles]—ironically, my sabbatical term, so I wasn't teaching, although I did go up to the jail [chuckles] because some of the students in the winter term course were in jail, and we could do a few things there. Anyway,—but I—it was, again, another sort of accident, as—as I'll explain.

What was happening there: Suddenly it appeared to me to be congruent with material that I had been working on or studying in relation to Greek literature previously, especially the philosophy of Henri[-Louis] Bergson. So suddenly you have this epiphany that, *My God! This relates to that, in a way that you could never have expected*, and that's what got me going on this. So how does it relate? I tried to think it through and so forth, and I had the added experience of going in the building.

Now, when I distributed this—and the date is there, May 8th, so it's still early in May; the term is not over, right?—it had—nobody else was writing about this. I mean, people talked about it and all that, but there was no—nothing that I knew of

which was an attempt to try to understand really what was happening, besides a slogan- —slogans thrown back and forth—you know, either “heroes of democracy and peace” or “anti-American riffraff.” You know, all kinds of slogans.

And this essay, because there was nothing else, was passed around a lot. And people—I remember [chuckles] Hans [H.] Penner, who was the dean at the time, a professor of religion—he said, “Well, you know, it’s a good try, Peter, but we just don’t—I can’t say much good for the philosophy of Bergson. So, you know, you’re very—the basis of the thought is defective, so how can the thought be anything but defective?”—and so forth. But people read it. And, for what it’s worth, it says something about what happened in the building.

DELLINGER: Why do you think other people weren’t writing about it?

BIEN: They were playing baseball. When things like this happen, you want to ignore them. This was not a nice thing at Dartmouth. And I told you, I think,—because I remember this so well—when at the later stages—it would have been late May or something, when we had another process of internal legal process with [William W.] “Bill” Ballard [Class of 1928], professor of—he’s deceased now, too—professor of biology, heading a kind of judiciary. And we had—you know, what to do—what should *we* do with these—they’d already been in jail, by civil laws, New Hampshire law and so forth. What should *we* do with these students? And one or two faculty that were very much connected with them.

And we had meeting after meeting after meeting in [Room] 105, Dartmouth [Hall], so we’re sitting in the seats, and the president’s on stage, right? With maybe a dean or something. And what I remember is President Dickey leading the meeting with huge tears coming down his cheeks. And poor man! You know, he’d been here 20-odd years. And he felt that what he had built, a family, a loving family, a community, was broken.

So the other reaction, which is normal, is “play baseball.” Now, think about it. And the students disappeared, and who knows what happened?

DELLINGER: So you went and visited these students in jail. Did they have any sense, the importance of what they'd done, of the severity of what they'd done?

BIEN: Well, they knew that—they put them in jail, if you're talking about severity. Yes, I think they—they felt that what—that what they had done was important. They were peaceful. They didn't hit anybody. They didn't have any guns. They did carry the president, but gently, and the dean. I don't think they—as far as I—and I don't have a, you know, vivid memory of this, but I never had the sense that they felt they had made a huge mistake. They felt that they had done something which they believed in. They had reacted against a war which they did not believe in, and civil society put them in jail, and that's probably what they had expected would happen. And they weren't in jail very long.

But what happened worse was sometimes break with family, and I do have a memory, because I was there, bringing books and doing things, and I do remember—and the sort of thing one does not forget—one of the fathers came up. The boy—the son is behind bars, you know, and the father is allowed to be in front of him, and screaming, "You rat! You horrid! You unpatriotic! Oh, how could you defame the country and insult the family?" You know, the works. And that must have hurt the poor—the boy very much. I have no idea what happened in the future.

DELLINGER: How did the faculty react to this incident?

BIEN: Well, you can't speak of the faculty as a whole. There were different people and different factions. One thing I would say is this: We were so glad that it wasn't like Columbia or Berkeley. We got off easy. It was minimal. And as I said before, the authorities—it was very much the governor who had control of the police and telling them what to do and so forth, and Dickey, being president. They acted with restraint. They—they waited. They argued with the students rationally. You know, "If you stay in, you'll be indicted and so forth, so why not come out?" [chuckles] and so on.

And we—Columbia was—the whole university was—it wasn't destroyed, but it was severely hurt for 20 years because of this. And Berkeley, somewhat the same. We kept

going. It was—it's not that it was minimal, but it involved, you know, very, very directly, a very small number of both faculty and students, and we just continued, you know, to exist with—we went on, and this fall term next year, and almost as though nothing had happened, although we no longer had ROTC.

That's what—what I remember. I'm not sure I'm right, but, you know, what trustees felt or—and President Dickey was very hurt, and you'd have to check the dates, but he—he stepped down very soon. He just couldn't continue.

DELLINGER: So you mentioned when we talked before some of the protest activities that the Quakers were involved in. Can you talk about those?

BIEN: Yeah. Well, we did—we—we—we, ourselves, went for training in draft counseling. In other words, these documents I've given you—we had to know what the law is. It's very important to know that—that conscientious objection is a bona fide law of the United States and of every civilized nation, I think. And that's amazing, because what that law says is that there's a spiritual dimension which is more important than the political one. And we—In God We Trust, you know. [Chuckles.] It says so on the coins and so forth.

Well, there is some response to that. So it's not that this is so far out and illegal and criminal or anything. It's a legal, recognized position. So we trained ourselves in the history of the CO idea, the history of how it was regulated, because the whole idea that—the situation that I went through was not the case in the Second World War. There weren't assignments of alternative military service; there were camps that the COs were sent to. And they were doing good work, like forestry or being—helping in insane asylums and doing—subjecting themselves to certain experiments, and so—anyway. But these things evolved, so we had to learn all that.

Then we counseled whoever came, and students did come. I can't tell you how many or what percentage. It was probably, you know—of the percentage, it was very small, but they—there were students, who wanted somehow to escape this. So we counseled them about applying for CO position. Many

of them could not do that because one of the apparent requirements was that your position was religious. If it was moral only, it would be denied. That, too, has changed. But then it was more or less like that.

So if somebody was very, very convinced that the war was totally wrong and they didn't want any part of it and they couldn't go the CO route, one way was to leave the United States and go to Canada. And you already know that we escorted students to the border and—having contacted Quakers in Montreal [Canada], and the Montreal people would come down. And somehow it was easier then. I guess they crossed the border and were taken in tow by the Montreal people, and they may still be there in Canada. Some married Canadians; others did not. Some came back; others did not, and so forth. There's some sense of that, but not anything that I know. So we did that.

We also—one of—I didn't do—do this myself, but I was privy to it. One of the very good people of our meeting did what he called street theater on the Dartmouth Green. He would dress up in some way and—and present a kind of dramatic presentation of what was wrong with the war and et cetera, and people would gather round.

Other Quakers manifested this in various ways, and I'm not sure it was all having to do with Vietnam. It may have been [the] Korean War later. There were some buses in Lebanon [New Hampshire] that would be filled with people that were going to be taken to induction, and at one point a couple of our Quakers lay down in front of the buses. You know, the police came and removed them and so forth. But it was a way of saying, "This should not happen." It was *their* way of saying that.

Also we had—we might even be doing this now but not, unfortunately, right now—vigils. And there would be—I—I was in some of them on the Green—not on the Green, out in front of the town offices on Main Street, four or five of us standing there with some literature and sign, saying something like, "The war is wrong.Let's enhance peace." And if somebody stopped, we'd have some brochure or something to give. And they also did that in West Lebanon [New Hampshire] and so forth, the Quakers. Lots. It was

very regular, maybe once a month. And something special on Easter and so forth.

So those were the main things.

DELLINGER: Did you see any changes in Dartmouth after the Parkhurst incident?

BIEN: Well, the great change was in the president, who le- —who basically retired. And the big change was we no longer had ROTC. That was a big difference. You know, little by little, people forgot, until something else happened, like various other wars. But I—I repeat what I said before: Unlike Columbia, when Dartmouth started in 1970 fall term, I think for most people and incoming freshman, it was pretty much the same, except there was no ROTC.

DELLINGER: So later, and in your time at Dartmouth since, how have you seen Dartmouth change?

BIEN: Well, of course, we—we went co-ed. And you can have no conception of what was involved now, at this stage. And we did it. We were not the first, to be sure. [Chuckles.] We were sort of late. But we did it. We did it poorly in the beginning, and we fixed things, and now the whole place seems to be controlled by women. But that was very exciting. And, mind you, it was the faculty that changed as well as—had to be.

DELLINGER: Mm-hm.

BIEN: And, of course, as a result of 1968, it wasn't just the war; it was the whole question of diversity and discrimination and so forth, and we met—I can't—I—I'm not absolutely sure of the dates, but I think it's very soon after '68. And we decided that we had to give advantageous admission to three groups: African-Americans, Native Americans and poor whites from New Hampshire and Vermont who had insufficient education in country schools, something like that. And we began to do that.

We changed the curriculum in English and in mathematics so English 5—when you came, it was already—the whole thing was no longer in the English department, the composition stuff, right?

DELLINGER: I think it was called Writing 5.

BIEN: Yeah, that's different. We used to do everything in the English department, and we were—we were proud that the most exalted professor, full professor, tenured, was teaching freshman English, you know? A little bit [chuckles], not too much. Anyway, we—so English 5 was the freshman course. One term.

So we devised an alternative called English 2-3 [pronounced two dash three], two and three equals five, two terms instead of one term. Lowered the number of students. It was maybe 12 instead of 16, something like that. And then put in there, as well as the teacher, a student tutor. And I taught those—that—we weren't supposed to use the word "remedial," but that's what it was. I taught it several times. It was very interesting to teach it.

They did something similar in mathematics. So those things were very different.

And we had a lot of trouble with the Native American program in the beginning, a lot of attrition. The people we brought from Arizona were so desperately cold [laughs], and they heated themselves with whiskey, and it—we had to get over that somehow, find better ways and so forth. But all these things worked out.

And the women students and the women faculty in many cases were miserable. Not all cases. Varied, you know? It was hard, for some. And that worked itself out. Took a while.

So these changes were huge. And for the better. And we had a very good president, [James O.] Freedman, and [James E.] Wright. I leave out some of the others. And it's a better place than it was in 1961 or 1969.

DELLINGER: Do you have any last thoughts—

BIEN: [Chuckles.]

DELLINGER: —that you'd like the program and the recording to—to know?

BIEN: Well, about the Viet- —this program?

DELLINGER: About anything you'd like.

BIEN: About anything. Well, I just give testimony, I suppose, that by that accident of being offered a job here—and I never found any reason whatsoever to want to leave, to go somewhere else, but I was treated very—very well. And so my last thought is of gratitude for a—well, it's not a whole life; it's a one-third of life, you know? Maybe slightly more than that, but a very important one, being in the right place, a good place that was very supportive, not only for me but for family. And it doesn't happen to everybody, so one has to be very grateful.

And we're still here, by choice. And it's still very—very helpful to be here, both in the Dartmouth—well, three things in our lives: One, Dartmouth, still continues for me; two, the Quaker meeting, which is very strong still, very good; and three, Kendal [at Hanover], up the road. So we're very, very privileged to be here. And it's much, much nicer with women.

DELLINGER: Of course.

BIEN: Of course.

DELLINGER: Well, thank you very much, Professor. This is Professor Peter Bien. It is June 1st, 2016, from the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College. Thank you very much. That's it.

[End of interview.]