

Interview with Harold Martin, editor and publisher of the Montgomery Advertiser, Montgomery, Alabama, July 15, 1974, conducted by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, transcribed by Linda Killen.

Jack Bass: One thing, I'd like for you to tell us just a little about your own experience with George Wallace and the paper's experience and how you perceive him and what's been his effect on Alabama politics.

Martin: Well, I came to Montgomery when bought this paper in 1963, just about the same time that George Wallace came as governor.

Walter De Vries: Came from where?

Martin: From Birmingham. He came in January and I came here in March of the same year. And his relations with the paper have been all right in ways. It just depends on what. . . . This is a very aggressive paper and I don't think that George Wallace has been treated any differently than any other governor. It just so happens that he's the only governor. . . well, the short time that Brewer was governor. We printed lots about Brewer, too, while he was governor and we just considered it our job to watch the government and what they were doing. And so we've had lots of controversy with him over things like this. At one time. . . I don't really remember what the issue was. We'd print editorials and he would call up. He used to call me all the time. He doesn't do this any more. He would call and raise Cain about the editorial. One time he demanded somebody come up there and talk to him and I went up and talked to him. At this point we printed every year a special section on the. . . . It started off after the governor had

been in for a year and it had done this on other governors, too. And this was about the second year, I guess, that he'd been in. Could have been the third. And they were laying the section out and Wallace called me about some editorial. All I recall is it had something to do with the confederate flag being on the dome of the capital. And he was pretty livid and which he said that we accused him of being a traitor. And somewhere in the conversation he got around to the special section we were going to produce and said that we had, were using him to sell the section with. I told him this wasn't true. And he said "Well, one of my people got a letter which you had sent out saying that I approved of it." And I said "Well, if you get that gentleman up here we'll tell him he's a liar because we haven't sent any letters out. All we've done so far is just plan the section. And besides that, if you object to the section going out having anything to do politically, we'll just drop it because it doesn't mean that much." What it was, it was bringing the state up with the accomplishments or whatever had happened. Couldn't do anything but help him because it was an industrial type section and sold to the cities and the counties and to anybody that would buy it. And the thing wound up. . . he had several of his people in and he wound up by asking me what the editorial meant. I told him it meant just what it said, that he put the flag up there and that it would take someone else to take it down because he'd already said he wasn't going to. And so he insisted that. . . . He kept talking about the editorial and then he switched back to the advertising. I said "Now you keep to one at a time and let's settle them. Are you objecting to advertising or are you objecting to the editorial? I don't want to talk about the two together." So he said "Well, I'm objecting to the editorial." I said "All right, then we'll discuss the editorial." And we

went over it. I didn't write it. I think Bill Macdonald did. Again he asked me what it meant and I said "Just what it said." That it's silly. And the flag was put up there in the observance of the centennial and "that you made statements that it's going to stay there and that some other governor would have to take it down if it ever comes down." This you remember at the time was a controversy. And the whole thing was kind of manufactured, from our viewpoint anyway. Everytime journalists from out of the state, and especially television people would come in they would take the camera and they would point it up there and they'd say "Gee, they don't even fly the flag on the capital." Well, the flag pole is around at the side, which you can't see going up Dexter Avenue and the American flag did fly on the pole where it's always flown, ever since the capital was built, I assume. And the other always had just the state flag on it. Well in checking other states we found that lots of states do the same thing. They fly their state flag on the capital and then have a flag pole for the American flag. And this flag was just put up during the centennial.

J.B.: [You mean] confederate battle flag.

Martin: Yes. . . well, it was a confederate flag.

W.D.V.: Wallace had not put the flag up?

Martin: Yes.

W.D.V.: He had?

Martin: For the centennial celebration. And he had left it there. And what we were really saying in the editorial is a lot to do over nothing. I mean it's causing a lot of dissension, lots of talk over it when it really doesn't make any difference. The American flag is flying around here. But he read into this that it was saying that he was a traitor because he wouldn't take the flag down. He was a traitor to the

country. But it didn't say that. But it did say he wouldn't take it down. I mean, just a flat statement. We better face it, it's going to stay there. Which he had said a statement. Well, I came on back to the office. And he said "Well, will you tell me just what that means?" I said "Yes, I can tell you what it means. I means just what it says." "Well, you go back and ask Bill Macdonald if that's what he meant." I said "I'll be glad to, but I can tell you what he's going to say before I go back." And he kept talking about this special section going on and I kept asking if he were trying to threaten me, if he was going to stop the special section--which. . . I guess he could put the word out that he didn't want anybody to advertise in it. But it didn't really make that much difference to us. You know, it was just an industrial section that the advertising department had gotten up. Had nothing to do with news. And so I came on back and talked to Bill Macdonald. He told me to call Adrian back and tell him. So I talked to Bill Macdonald. Called Adrian back and I said "Ed, Bill said that the editorial means exactly what it says. It's pretty plain English and there's no use me giving any further explanation of it. And you tell the governor that it's my opinion that he was trying to threaten us with advertising. So I'm just going to cancel the advertising section because I don't want anything tied in politically with our advertising." And he said "Oh, I'm sure the governor didn't mean that. He didn't mean that at all." And I said "Well, I think he did. And as a result I'm going to cancel this section. Not going to print it." And I did. So about two months later I was making a speech one night and still down here working. About 7 o'clock the phone rang and it was Wallace. Said "Harold, I just been sitting up here thinking about our conversation. I didn't want to

apologize to you. I really know better than that. Now some people are going to say the governor backed down." And I said "Well governor I don't see what it's backing down about. We were discussing an editorial and as far as I am concerned [an insignificant] editorial and I don't really know what you're talking about when you say backing down. But I do appreciate your calling me." And nothing was said about the special section. So two days after this. . . . We always had a run down of all the state departments and all in this section, too. So about two days after this the advertising director got a call from Ed Huey [?] and he said "Now we'll make all the statistics and everything for the state available to you for this special section you're going to run." "Well didn't Mr Martin tell you we're going to cancel that section?" And he said "No, no, they got that all straightened out." "No, Mr Martin told me to cancel the section. We're not even working on it any more." And we did and that was the end of that. It was one of these situations where the advertising department . Didn't make lots of difference to us. But this was the first run in which indicated to me that he was trying to tell me what to put in the paper. He wanted to. . . . In fact he had asked me on the one before when Bill Jones was up there if he could read. . . . Bill Jones called me and asked if he could read the section, what was in it. And I told him no. He called me three or four times during the day and he called me back late at night and said the governor told him he couldn't go to bed until he found out what was in that section. Would I let him read it. I told him no. Read it in the paper like everybody else. Birmingham News printed one. They took it up and let him read it. Went through the whole thing. It's just an industrial section. Again, it's something silly. But from a

news viewpoint we didn't feel like anybody ought to be seeing what. . . . We don't ever let anyone see a story before printing. Regardless of who it is or what the conditions are, unless it's a lawyer, our lawyer. Well, a little while after this. . . . We ran editorials. . . . For a while he'd call me up on an editorial. And I set broad editorial policy here but I don't preread the editorials. I do this on purpose. I think we have two of the best editorial products in the country, and I think this is the reason we have them. The Advertiser doesn't always agree with the Journal and sometimes I don't agree with either one of them, but they are creative and they do an excellent job and I want to keep it that way. So that's the way they're run. So when an editorial comes out I read it in the paper like everyone else. And the governor would call me up about an editorial. He'd call me at home. I'd always say "Well, I haven't read it yet. Tell me what it said." And he'd go over it and I'd kind of laugh about it and pass it off. He did it for six or seven months and then he just quit. Then one day. . . . This was when Grover Hall came over to my office. Bob Bingham was the political writer. And said that Bob had just left the governor's office and that the governor said that he was going to cut off our whiskey advertisement because we'd said bad things about him in the editorials and unless we would agree not to do this any more he was going to cut off the whiskey advertisement. Well there's no way, legally, that the governor can cut off any whiskey advertising because the state doesn't place any whiskey advertising. What it is. . . the state has an ABC board and they sell the whiskey in the state stores. This had been done once before. As I get into it, you'll see how it was done. Legally they place no advertising therefore there would be no way for them to

cut any advertising off. And I asked Roy "What is it you want me to do?" And he said "Well, I've talked to him and I think he's going to do it." "Unless what?" "Unless you give him assurances that you are not going to write any editorials about him." I said "Well, you know better than that." So about two days later Bob Bingham came in and said that he was in the governor's office and the governor picked up the telephone and called Mr Carwell, the ABC administrator, in his presence and told him to cut off the whiskey advertising for the Advertiser. What he specifically told him was to tell the distributors that if they advertised in these papers then he would put their whiskey under the shelf where it couldn't be sold. So it's not really the state cutting it off, but it's an illegal means of getting to the distributors. Well, we called several distributors and we never could get any. . . . And the cancellations came in. Everything was cancelled. And we never could get any of the distributors to admit why they cancelled. They just said "Well, we're going to pull our products out of there for a while. We're going to test somewhere else." Or something like this. But no one would ever give us a direct statement. We stayed off a while and people. . . I guess. . . . All of a sudden we started getting it again. This happened about three times. And it was always after we'd run an editorial and we'd lose. . . . Everytime it would be cancelled for a month or two and then several months later it would come back. And then during the campaign, when Laurleen was running, we got the cancellations again and this time it was permanent. We stayed off for about 13 months. It cost us roughly \$100,000. But we were determined. . . . We never asked him to put it back. We did run a story of what he had done, on the front page. But as far as going beyond that, we

didn't do anything. We did research and we found in our letters one telegram from a distributor saying that he had been contacted by the governor, by the ABC board and told not to advertise in the paper. We thought this sufficient to file a suit for interference with trade and prepared to do so. Just as we got ready to file the suit Laurleen went in the hospital and we decided that this just wasn't the time to file any suit against the governor and her in the hospital. So we never did file it and after she died I ran into Brewer. . . immediate after he. . . . Well, I didn't actually contact him myself. After he was elected I sent someone up, the advertising director, to tell him that we didn't think that he would get involved in this. That we had a suit ready to file but we had been holding back because of Laurleen being in the hospital. And we were going to file it if it happened again. He said "I wouldn't do anything like that, anything illegal like that." So that was the end of that. We were off that time I guess about 13 months. That's about the only problems as far as problems we've ever had.

J.B.: How about after he came back in 1970?

Martin: Never received any cancellations or anything. It's never been discussed.

W.D.V.: How about editorial policies. Have you discussed that since then?

Martin: No, he doesn't talk to me any more. He called me just before the election one night, just before this past election, and talked about two hours asking me to endorse him. I just told him I didn't see how I was going to do that. That's the only conversation I've had with him during this time unless I just, you know, run into him at a meeting or something.

W.D.V.: Why do you think that you ~~would~~ ought to endorse him?

Martin: Why did I think what?

W.D.V.: Why did he think that you ought to endorse him?

Martin: Well, he wants everybody to endorse him.

W.D.V.: But you never had before.

Martin: Uh, the paper had endorsed him I believe before I came down here in '63 when Grover Hall. . . when he was running in '62. The paper had endorsed him then. But I don't think that really had anything to do with his. . . . I asked him if he thought there was any race to it at all and he said "Oh no, I'm going to beat him in his own county." [Interruption on tape.]

W.D.V.: Assess George Wallace's overall impact on this state. I mean has he been good or bad for Alabama?

Martin: Well, that's a pretty broad question. Let me answer it this way. My complaint, if it's a complaint, or our criticism over Wallace has been the entire time that he's been interested in everything except Alabama. That he's never been interested in being governor of Alabama. And that he's one a poor administrator partially because he doesn't like administration, partly because he doesn't have time to fool with it. And I don't think he's made any impact on Alabama to any great degree other than just being here. I don't think any programs. . . . If you want to look at the programs that he put in. . . . He would go back to the junior colleges and the college programs and the vocational schools and free textbooks as being his doing. Well, we had free text books up through grammar school when I was in grammar school and it had just been stopped. There's a little story in that, too. I was on a committee. It's not the committee that's been appointed now. It was kind of the unofficial committee. Most of them were educators from the different

colleges. And about the time this junior college program came up, we met at the Whitley Hotel and Gov Wallace came down to explain the free text book act and the junior college program to us. And when he finished we asked him one question. Well, two questions, one on each one. We said "Governor, let's talk about the free text books. Wouldn't it be better to be sure we had the money to give the free text books all the way through and start with a certain number of grades first each year and be sure everyone has text books and then add a grade every year?" These were educators. I don't know why I was on the committee, but I was. And his answer to that was "If you dare to as much as make a statement against the free text books, I will guarantee you there will never be another raise for teachers as long as I'm the governor of the state of Alabama. And believe me there are more truck drivers and taxi drivers and common people that want free text books than there are teachers." So that disposed of that question. The next question, on the junior colleges, was arent we in some kind of danger in building 16 or 17 junior colleges and vocational schools at one time. Wouldn't we be better to plan these over a period of years, for about three reasons. One, to be sure that they're placed where they're needed and not placed politically. Two, to be sure that they can be properly staffed, without robbing all of the high school professors, principals or top people to staff these junior colleges, leaving a vacancy there which can't be overcome that quick. And three, to be sure we've got the money to build them with. Without having to worry about the money at the end of the year. The answer to that took about 40 minutes and it was a discourse on his trips around the country. How he'd made fools out of people at Harvard and how he was smarter than they are and that he told them, said "If you tell

some [little boy?] ask him a question, if you say you tell me if you're a

he or a she, I'll answer that question." Said. . . well, just went on and on about his campaign and in the middle of this he threw a sentence in which scared everybody. He said we ought to write all of our text books in Alabama anyway. We have enough people here who are smart enough and we shouldn't ever use text books written outside the state. And wound up with a discourse of how many junior colleges they have in California. And we're as smart as they are so we ought to have as many colleges as they do. And that was the end of the explanation of the junior colleges. I think the program was a good program. No one ever questioned whether or not we should have junior colleges. No one ever questioned whether or not we should have free textbooks. It was just the method that was to be used. Now as an example, we have a junior college in Alexander City which is 50 miles from here. We run three buses a day taking people from Montgomery to the junior college. Although we have two colleges here run by the state. So this was the type of thing we were talking about. So the junior college program, the free text books, is a wonderful program. But whether or not George Wallace added anything to it by the way it was handled. . . because it was completely political, politically handled after it got started. So certainly, the program was a good program and he was governor while it was done. It was good. He gives figures all the time of how much industry he has brought in. He has brought in and the state government has brought in and how much we've advanced. And yet we've advanced not near as much as the other southeastern states around us. Per capita income in the state of Alabama has had a pretty substantial increase and yet only Mississippi and Arkansas. . . that's the only two states that are lower than us in per capita income in the whole United States. So, it just has to. . . look at what you're comparing it with. If we're comparing it

with. . . . Have we made progress in Alabama? Yes, I think we have. Have we kept up with the progress of the other southeastern states? No, we haven't. So who can say whether or not we would have made the progress that we've made without Wallace or with someone else. Would we have made more with someone else? I don't know. We have made progress, yes.

J.B.: Let me ask you a question about that free text books because I want to understand it because I think it's sort of significant in terms of understanding Wallace. The state had free text books and then it was discontinued. . . .

Martin: And I don't know when it was discontinued. All I know is that when I was going to school, to grammar school, elementary school, I went to school in Birmingham.

J.B.: This would have been when?

Martin: 1930 I started, I guess.

J.B.: So in the '30s they had free textbooks?

Martin: Well, at the time I graduated from grade school, eight years, we had no junior high schools in the Birmingham system. We have eight years and then four years in the high schools. But I received free text books all the way through the 8th grade and then you bought your own in high school.

J.B.: You don't know whether that was strictly a local situation?

Martin: No, no I don't. But in Jefferson county. . . .

J.B.: But when he started free text books, he started [unclear]
, is that it?

Martin: Yes, he started all at the same time. What we wanted to do was maybe take six. . . . And the first year the program was in there was not enough text books to go around and they didn't get enough

allotment for them and some of the kids were having to use someone else's books and pass the books around. Just exactly what we were afraid was going to happen, did happen. Just exactly what we had pointed out to him could happen in the junior colleges, did happen. Not only did they build them in the wrong places. Some of them in the places where they shouldn't have been because of politics. The second was a tremendous problem. They did take the top people out of the other systems, which did hurt. And staffing that many junior colleges at one time, when we already were short of teachers, didn't help the situation any. It didn't help the quality of the education. It took several years to get the junior colleges up to what they ought to be. Now maybe that's inevitable with a new school. I'm not an educator, I don't know.

W.D.V.: To go back to the assessment of Wallace, some people assert that here was a man who occupies an office that institutionally is one of the strongest in the country. I mean the governor's office in this state is very strong. The legislature, in comparison to that office, is quite weak. He's been able to dominate that legislature. And the other southern states have been, there have been real reform movements to write new constitutions, to reorganize the executive branch, tax reform, and so on. Yet you've seen none of that with Wallace and he's been dominating state politics since 1963.

Martin: Well, he's been dominating the state politics. Alabama has, if you analyze the state government under the analysis that a political scientist would use, we have a weak governor form, not a strong governor. You know, they analyze this strong-weak according to how many committee heads he appoints and how many are elected. We do not come under. . . . The reason the governor has been dominant, the

governor has always been the titular head of the Democratic party in

Alabama and there's been no other party. He has dominated always simply by his will power and by his assess to the people. You know, Gov Fulsome ran into this in his term in office. He was elected by a majority and the legislature just rebelled against everything that he did. And he got nothing through. Absolutely nothing. Wallace, on the other hand. . . . The legislature. . . . He was so popular with the people the legislature would not ^{buck} bug him. He threatened to have everybody defeated that did buck him and on one occasion in the election did so. Everybody that had opposed his programs was defeated. So his power came from the people. No question about it. To me it's a tragedy. Here is a man that had. . . the people would do anything that he asked them to do and he didn't ask them to do anything.

W.D.V.: That was my question. Why?

Martin: Because he is completely motivated by politics. He has no interest in the state of Alabama, never has had. He's a poor administrator, doesn't know anything about administration. And he just hasn't proposed anything. He's been too busy running for something else rather than trying to run the state.

W.D.V.: But you know, he talks like a populist. . . economic liberal. That what you need is a progressive tax reform and all that sort of stuff. But you really had none of it back here.

Martin: The only legislation during the last session of the legislature. . . which, they had a very poor performance themselves. . . but the only thing that the governor put forward was he told them he didn't want any taxes and he wanted the budget passed. And he got the budget passed and he got no taxes. And that's the total effort put out by the governor's office to lead the legislature.

W.D.V.: Last week when he was talking to the Democratic chairman in

Washington--he talked to the association up there--he was talking about the need for tax reform at the national level. We've got to make it more progressive, it's too regressive. But if you look at this state's tax system you couldn't say it's progressive. What I'm saying is, there seems to be a lot of rhetoric, but when it translates down into performance there doesn't seem to be much performance.

Martin: There's not. There's been no leadership. State government hasn't had any leadership. That's what I'm saying. Wallace has been running for some office all the time rather than offering any leadership for the state of Alabama. He's offering no leadership for this state.

W.D.V.: Is that one of the keys to his personality? An intense interest only in campaigning. . . .

Martin: I don't know whether that's a key to it or not. He has a tremendous personality and he's sharp and he's quick with his answers and he has a rapport with people because he's convinced people that he's for them although if you analyze what he says it's not there. But the people have gone along with it. I think that the key to his personality is that he just has an outgoing personality. He's good at names. He remembers people's names and he calls their names. And he just gets close to people. But he's offered no leadership for the state. In the beginning years. . . nothing but. . . if you want to talk about your rhetoric. Rhetoric was nothing but talk, too. The integration of the schools is a good example of that. Although Wallace made all the talk at the University of Alabama about what he was going to do and what he was trying to do, this was completely political. The students were already admitted. They had already preregistered. They had their classes set up. They had their dormitory space. They had been promised by the

board of trustees that they would be entered if they waited until this time. And then the board of trustees, after talking with Wallace, decided it would be better for the federal court to tell them to do it. The day they went down and stood in the school house door everything was already settled before they got down there. But yet if you ask people. . . . And the schools have been integrated. And if you ask people about this they'll say "Old George really tried. He really. . . he's against integrating the schools." And we say "Well look, the schools were integrated." And they would always come back and say "Yes, but he tried." We were doing some polls. And people. . . the trait that they admired most about Wallace was the fact that he fought for what he believed. On these polls. And this was done professionally. We didn't do it ourselves. And on these people would put. . . even his enemies would put he's a racist or he's a dictator and then over on the back part where it says what do you admire about him they would put in there "We admire the way he fights for what he thinks is right." This is, of course, what defeated Albert Brewer, because he wouldn't fight. This has always been true in Alabama. Alabama has always had a governor that would speak out. that would take up for what he thought was right. And Wallace has done that. Whether he thought it was right or not, I don't know. People always say "Well, has the governor changed?" Sure the governor's changed, because times have changed and what politician wouldn't change. They always get back then and say "Well, has he mellowed because of being wounded?" Well, I don't know that either. Nobody knows that except him. But the change was already evident before this. He was making the change because the situations change. . . a man can't get elected in the race question, I don't think. We didn't think he could the last time he did. But he can't get elected nationally on the type of news that he was

putting out before. So he's changed his views. Whether this is a real change and what motivated it, I don't know. But we expected. . . as conditions changed he adapted himself to the conditions. Because he's 100% political.

J.B.: What was the reaction to your speech calling for Wallace to step down?

Martin: The reaction from whom? From the people?

J.B.: What were the reactions then?

Martin: The reaction at the capital wasn't very good. Let's go back to what really precipitated that. . . . After Wallace was. . . . You know I'm smart enough to know that this wasn't going to cause him to resign. [Unclear.] He was in bad health. The state wasn't doing anything. And no one dared criticize him.

J.B.: This was when? Late '72 early '73?

Martin: I'll have to look it up. It was while he was still in and out of the hospital. Although he was back at the mansion at this time. But since he had been wounded, no one had issues any complaints or any criticism of Wallace and it looked like it was time somebody started bringing the state back to face reality. And it had to start by saying that nobody's running the state. And you had to blame it on the governor or the circumstances surrounding the governor. not running the state and a bunch of his henchmen running it for him. So this accomplished what I expected it to accomplish. It started criticism, pro and con. Criticism and criticism of the criticism again. About Wallace's condition. Wallace told somebody some time that it was the best thing that ever happened to him. Made him mad enough to fight hard to get well. If it did, that's wonderful. The facts were true. The facts that I gave them in there. The state was being run by a bunch of parasites and he

wasn't controlling it. And at the time I was sincere in that that's what should have been done, although I never expected it to happen. No one expected it. . . . I got no adverse criticism, if that's what you're talking about, from people. If you're talking about hate letters or anything like that, no. And this really shocked me. We got more letters complementary than we did letters of criticism. My wife [something about giving them to the paper.] We ran a few of them, representative of both sides. But we actually received more letters complementary of what was said than criticizing us for saying it. But as far as any real adverse reaction. . . didn't get any. But it did open communications up again. It opened senators and other legislators who decided now they could talk. One of them even wrote a letter saying that this was true. Saying that they couldn't get in to talk to the governor. Every time they had to talk to him they had to talk to somebody else. Does that answer that?

J.B.: What do you think is going to happen after Wallace leaves the state political scene, whether to run for the Senate or whatever and whenever? I mean where do you see the state heading politically after Wallace?

Martin: I don't know. It just depends on. . . it's a long time to an election. Depends on who's elected, I guess. This is a good state. It's my home and I'm not critical of the state. I think we could have made a lot more progress than we've made but I do think we have made some progress and under the circumstances done pretty good. I think the climate in this state is acceptable to leadership and I think they want leadership. If we get that type of leadership in the next administration I think we'll be receptive to it. But right now I don't know.

I don't know who's going to. . . . I don't think you can look now and say well, Beasley or Baxley, the only two you can see now, they're going to be the next governor. That may be true and it may not be. Just depends on what happens between now and the . . . three years.

W.D.V.: You know, if he is totally political, wouldn't he try to extend his influence beyond 1978 by running Cornelia or in some way trying to stay active?

Martin: I don't think so. George has never been successful in trying to translate his popularity to someone else. For example, during this last time when he won he backed a candidate in north Alabama [some name] and he lost. lost very handily and lost mainly because Wallace interfered and because we printed it. He sent one of the state workers up in a state truck, state car full of documents or campaign literature. And the fellow had a wreck [and threw it] all over the highway. And this kind of let it out and people just got mad that he was interfering. He had a relative of his, Reeves, that he was backing for the legislature in south Alabama and he lost. I don't believe he could pull off another Laurleen. He pulled it off one time but it's very unlikely. . . . Of course, again, you don't know. I wouldn't doubt it. I don't know of this ever happening in Alabama, that a man could extend his authority after he went out. Well, not his authority as much. . . . It's hard to transfer your popularity.

J.B.: Is Wallace's popularity now based as much on sympathy as anything else?

Martin: The polls which I can show you that we had run, and this has been a year or so ago now, was concluded completely sympathy. You'd have to interpret it in which the people would say. . . this was done not

too long after the speech asking him to retire. In which the majority of the people did not want him to run for president again. But we ran polls before he ran the last time and the majority of the people didn't want him to run then. But when it got to the governor's question, as to whether or not he should run, the answers were no, that he should not run again. But then when it got down to who would you vote for, it was George Wallace and heavily weighted in that direction. So the interpreter of the polls interpreted this as being a sympathy vote.

J.B.: And if he were to decide to run for the Senate in '78, particularly if Sparkman did not run, presumably would be the man to beat. Is this the general perception?

Martin: I would assume so because I don't know anybody else right now politically. See, we just don't have anybody. This has been another thing. Wallace has been so dominant that he's kept other people from rising up because people just did not want to run against him and you've had no outstanding state wide leadership because of that. So I don't really see anybody else on the scene right now. . . . You noticed the last election, the whole election around who's closest to Gov Wallace. Beasley uses it, Woods used it, even [name] of the Republicans beginning to use it.

J.B.: So one effect then has been that he's in effect frozen political development in the state.

Martin: I think that's true.

W.D.V.: In both parties?

Martin: There's no Republican party. Well, they wouldn't like that statement, I guess, there's no Republican party. In the Goldwater. . . when Goldwater was elected, we elected . . . county commission. . . Re-

publican. One of the commissioners, he'd run four or five times before and he was more shocked than anybody in the city when he was elected or anybody in the county. He's since been defeated. What have we got in the legislature now in the way of Republicans? Bill Dickenson in the Congress was elected this same time. And once a person gets in--he's on the military committee--it's very hard to defeat him. It would also be very hard for another Republican to be elected to that office. John Buck Hanna in Birmingham and Jack Evert in Mobile are popular individuals and once they get in. . . in this length of time. . . and they all went in the same time. . . it would be hard to defeat them with a Democrat or another Republican. A Republican couldn't defeat them either. They're not running anyone. They're not doing anything for governor. They don't have enough people running in the offices to say they even have a Republican party. They'll field two or three candidates but then they'll stay away from the big ones and until they get to the point they can do that I'd say there is no effective Republican party.

W.D.V.: What are the basic political changes that you've seen in the last 25 years? In this state.

Martin: Well, if you're talking about 25 years, you're going back to Gov Fulsome and coming up from that time. 25 years does not encompass lots of other people since Wallace has been in so long. But Fulsome was talking about a constitutional revision when he was elected in '46. Pushed for it and tried to get it. ^{Fulsom}~~Fulsome~~ was talking about the one man one vote in 1946. Fulsome was way ahead of his time in the things that he was advocating. But I haven't seen any basic political changes. Still trying to get the constitution reform through. We've had during the last few years a good bit of judicial reform mainly because a fine chief justice were elected. Been more change in there. . . that's the

only department that has really changed. But there's nothing else that has changed drastically. [Unclear.] Some big federal changes.

W.D.V.: the people we talk to assert that the basic political and social change that has occurred in this state have ~~be~~ come about because of the federal judiciary.

Martin: Right, that's what I said. That there have been nothing except federal changes. And this is true all the way through. We printed stories about the prisons. Just story after story about the thing. A series and at the end of this we wound up with one warden getting a year's sentence, prison sentence, and got parole . Two wardens being fired and the prison commissioner being fired. As soon as Wallace went in he brought back the commissioner that was fired as his assistant. And we wrote some more stories and they fired him again. But no changes were made in prison reform until two prisoners--with all of this, all the investigation, all the proof that it was there. But nothing was done until the two or three prisoners filed a federal suit and the federal court took it over and told them what to do. Laurleen did a lot--and it's not critical of her. She had an intense interest in mental health. And I think had she lived she would have made some reforms in mental health. But with all the talking that he picked up, that George picked up about what he was going to do in mental health, nothing was done in mental health until the was filed and the federal court told them what they had to do in mental health. And you can go right down the line with this. With education and everything else. . . has been done by the federal court. The reapportionment. The legislature didn't want to do it because it was unpopular. So they let the federal court do it for them and then fuss about the way they reapportioned.

J.B.: Property tax?

Martin: Property tax the same way. Now that's something that, according to Wallace, should have been done a long time ago. And it should have been done a long time ago.

J.B.: Could he have done it a long time ago if he'd wanted to do it?

Martin: I really believe that Wallace was popular enough that he could have done anything he wanted to. By doing it, do you mean could he have gotten it past the legislature or. . . . I think he could have had anything passed he wanted in the legislature. He could have done anything he wanted done. At one time. Not the last legislature. But the one before that I think he could have done anything he wanted done. But no one wanted to do it because it wasn't popular with the people and it wasn't popular with certain interest groups like the Farm Bureau.

J.B.: How influential is the Farm Bureau:

Martin: Oh, I think they're very influential. They put lots of money into campaigns. That's a real active organization. Always has been. Reckon you can read V. O. Key's assessment of it and it's the same today as it was when Key wrote.

J.B.: How about the other interest groups?

Martin: Oh, there're so many of them. Everybody's got an interest group. This is what the ethics bill. . . . This is an example now of how things have been conducted. The ethics bill started off in an effort to control interest groups and their relationship with the legislators. Now, again, if you go back and look at some of the things that we've printed during the last few years. . . we've found engineering contracts money being handed to people for doing no work on federal highways. And then the federal government, when it got right down to it,

didn't have enough guts to do anything about it except stop it. But it didn't have enough nerve to fight Wallace and to get involved with any of his people. Had his brother selling asphalt. His brother bought an asphalt company. Selling asphalt to the state. I think we were able to prove that it was costing about 50 cents a ton extra for all of the asphalt that the state bought because of the way the bids were being put out. And they were giving fake bids to each other. By fake I mean three of them would go together and submit bids and they just divided the state up with this. We spent money in engineering contracts that were. . . no engineering done. They spent the money on the asphalt more than we needed on it. All the way through all this that's happening. . . these are special interest groups. So we printed so much of this that the people just got upset. Because, now, if an average businessman that was elected as a legislator and he did anything, if he took any of this, he's liable for prosecution. But if an attorney did it, he just listed it as a retainer and it was perfectly legal for him to do anything he wanted to. The opticians had a legislator. The truckers had a legislator. Almost any group. . . . The insurance people had a legislator. All of them had one or more. The power company. All of them had legislators on the payrolls as retainers, listed as retainers. So the ethics bill came about in an effort to make the legislators disclose who they were taking money from, people that had anything in the house, or in the senate. . . .

[End of side of tape.]

--put 55 amendments on it in an effort to kill it and included all kind of people that shouldn't be involved in it, getting completely away from the original concept of legislators that were on retainers. And at the last minute they even put an amendment on it that anyone that covered,

or any newsman that covered the legislature had to be registered and he

couldn't even sit in the gallery where everyone else could unless he was registered. And had to disclose his income and how much he made and who he got any money from. This was done kind of as a joke when they did it. Well, the senate was so sure that the house wouldn't pass it. . . such a stupid bill with the amendments on it. . . that they sent it on over to the house. Well, the house wasn't about to turn it down after the senate did, and they didn't think the governor would sign it. So they passed it. And the governor felt like everybody had been wanting an ethics bill and he'd been for ethics so he couldn't turn it down. So he signed the stupid thing. It's been in court ever since. No ethics bill at all. And now, in my opinion, we're not going to have any ethics bill. They're going to come back and say "You wanted an ethics bill. Look what harm it did." They had the doctors on it and doctors had to go to court to get themselves off of it. It extended itself to people like on a library board in the city, that receive no pay whatsoever. Citizens that were on the park and recreation board that received no remuneration for what they were doing. In cities all over the state of Alabama everybody started resigning. They feel. . . they were private citizens and they didn't know why they should be revealing the source of their income. Because the bill was intended for legislators that are dealing with special interests. I think now. . . it's got to be dead. The attorney general's given 50 or 60 decisions on it. The judge's ruled on injunctions by six or seven different groups that didn't want to do this and the whole thing is setting there. And the commission set up. And even after it was put in they drug their feet after they were appointed to be sure they were passed the election before they had to reveal their contributions and all. They didn't put it into effect until

after that. And I think now that we've got no ethics bill I don't think we are going to have any. When they come back they're going to say "Well, look what happened. People are either going to be honest or they're going to be dishonest. You can't legislate the morals." So that's the end of the ethics bill. All through lack of leadership.

[End of interview.]