

NYTimes Ronan Remains on Payroll As Adviser to Rockefeller

By DAVID A. ANDELMAN

Since last May, when he openly on any major issue from stepped down as chairman of the moment more than 17 years the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Dr. William J. Ronan first joined the public payroll and the private payroll of Mr. Rockefeller. For years, in his dealings with many of the state's most powerful figures, Dr. Ronan presented the views of and negotiated for his boss, the Governor.

And later, it was Dr. Ronan, under the personal guidance of Mr. Rockefeller, who took over the Metropolitan Commuter Transportation Authority, later the M.T.A.—a position that expressed it, "in the public transit area as much power as Robert Moses ever possessed in the field of highway travel."

He is, the politician continued, "no Nelson Rockefeller as Robert Moses was to Governor Al Smith."

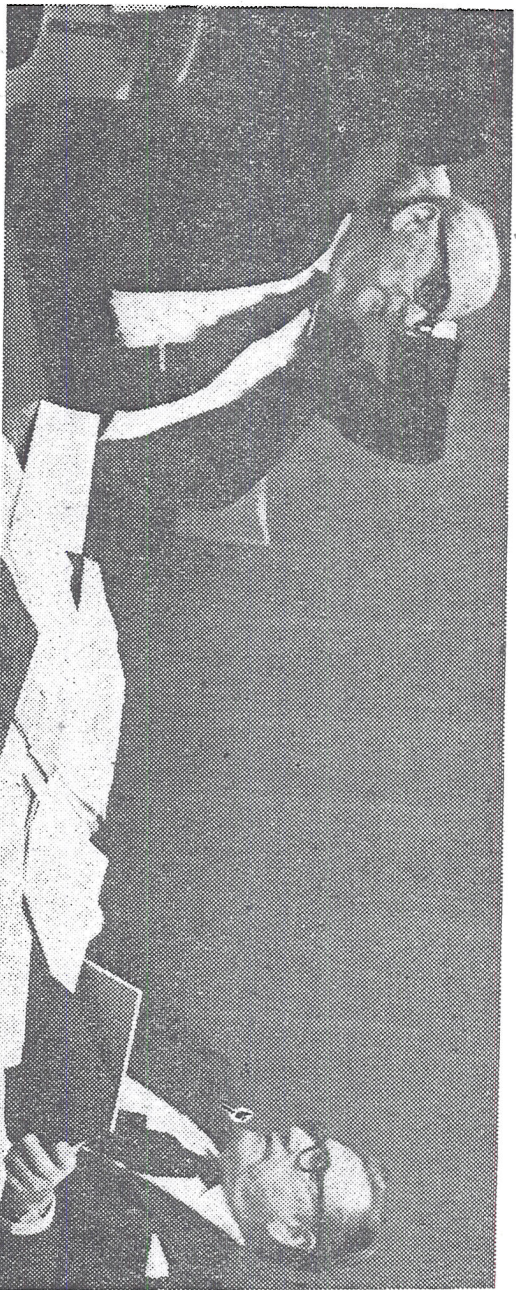
1956 Meeting Recalled

In 1956, at the age of 44, William Ronan was "discovered" for New York government by Charles Preusse, then City Administrator for Mayor Robert F. Wagner. Mr. Preusse brought Mr. Ronan into City Hall as First Deputy City Administrator from his post as dean of the Graduate School of Public Administration and Social Service at New York University.

It was to be a short-lived relationship. Dr. Ronan joined the city administration in July, 1956. In December, Nelson Rockefeller, then a private citizen who had never met Dr. Ronan, summoned him to the 56th-floor suite of offices in Rockefeller Center that the future Governor then maintained.

Neither Dr. Ronan, nor Mr. Rockefeller, nor any other associate has ever disclosed the details of that meeting, but close associates said yesterday that "their relationship began

Never, according to public figures and private friends of both, did they ever disagree there."



Dr. William J. Ronan, left, and Nelson A. Rockefeller chatting in office of Mr. Rockefeller's commission on critical choices here in June. After serving 18 years as a protegee of Mr. Rockefeller, he continues as a family adviser.

The New York Times/Paul Hossfeld

"There was some quid pro quo," said one former associate of Dr. Ronan's. And, within weeks, Dr. Ronan had joined the Rockefeller team.

His first job was staff director of the state's Temporary Commission on Constitutional Revision, to which Mr. Rockefeller had just been appointed chairman. Mr. Ronan was not long to remain there, either in 1958 he headed the research staff of Mr. Rockefeller's first successful gubernatorial campaign staff. On Nov. 11, 1958, he was named the new governor-elect's personal secretary.

A Key Negotiator

As Robert Moses did with Al Smith three decades earlier, Dr. Ronan, quickly cemented his relationship with the new Governor and became one of his principal advisers.

By 1960, Harold Pryor, general chairman of the Long Island Rail Road's United Transportation Union, recalled that Dr. Ronan had already begun to represent the Governor in some delicate union negotiations.

"We didn't see eye to eye," Mr. Pryor recalled yesterday, "but he was speaking for the Governor. And one of the

things I would have to say was that he was loyal to the governor."

In his long years of service to Nelson Rockefeller, Dr. Ronan conducted many sensitive negotiations for him. Among them was the complex dealing that led to the merger of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The merger had been challenged in a law suit in 1962 by the Chase Manhattan Bank, headed by David Rockefeller, the Governor's brother, which was acting in its capacity as true trustee for the holders of \$367-million in outstanding T.B.T.A. bonds. The bank was seeking to protect the profits of the T.B.T.A., which the Governor wanted to sue to support the deficit-ridden Transit Authority, a constituent of the M.T.A.

In the deal worked out by Dr. Ronan, the suit was settled out of court, with the bondholders getting an extra quarter of one per cent interest, plus a guarantee that the state's credit would stand behind the bonds. The state's commuters received the toll revenues from the T.B.T.A.

Hugh Morrow, Mr. Rockefeller's press secretary, said Mr. Rockefeller canceled the debt on the basis of "personal friendship alone."

"It was an extremely close relationship throughout—Rockefeller and Ronan," a former senior adviser to Dr. Ronan recalled yesterday. "They talked three, four times a day, every day. And it was not just about transportation. They talked about everything."

But in the loyal traditions of the "clan," as one official put it, few of the former officials would go into any areas of difference between Mr. Rockefeller and Dr. Ronan.

"They had their differences of opinion on various subjects," said the adviser who had observed their thrice daily talks. "But once Rockefeller made up his mind that was it. The role of adviser is to advise and not to fight publicly. And that's why they've been together for 18 years."