



“They’re Trying to Pressure You”

Date: 1965-12-24

Conversation: WH6512-04-9329

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: Richard J. Daley

Start Time: 10:21

Duration: 03:27

Place: LBJ Ranch

SCENE SETTER: After President Johnson mentioned a protest at his ranch by a group of anti-poverty activists from Syracuse, Chicago mayor Richard J. “Dick” Daley expressed his frustration with the Community Action Program. Johnson and Daley then discussed the possibility of replacing R. Sargent Shriver as head of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

President Johnson: I got your poverty group [People’s War Council against Poverty] from Syracuse [New York] down here giving me hell—

Richard J. “Dick” Daley: Oh, yeah?

President Johnson: —because the mayor [William F. Walsh] turned them down, and they came over and invaded my house yesterday and got arrested.

Daley: My God.

President Johnson: We got FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] says one of them is a strong Communist sympathizer.

Daley: Yeah. Well, they’re trying to pressure you, Mr. President. And [*unclear*] pressure you. They’re trying to snatch control of this country, control of everything just under this program. And the fact is, and the truth of the matter is, that they’ve never had such a fine program in the history of our country. [*President Johnson coughs.*] And what I keep saying is, “Lord God, let’s get together. Let’s cooperate. We’re fine to be fighting, but what difference does it make who will get the credit as long as we get jobs, and get the people out of slums and blight, and get education?” But many of these people throughout the country are not concerned with the solutions. They’re concerned with the agitation of the problem. And this is all over the country. And they’ve seen an opportunity to snatch a popular issue, but one that you and I know doesn’t bear the right of logic, and that is: only the poor can control these programs. Well, that’s ridiculous.

President Johnson: That’s a good—

Daley: Because you have to have [*President Johnson snorts*]*—it'd be the same thing as saying in your operation that only the soldier could control the army, that you are not entitled to generals, to scientists, to the great experts, to the fine educated and dedicated [unclear]—*

President Johnson: What shape would we be in now if [R. Sargent] Shriver got out of the program with a blast?

Daley: How do you mean “a blast”?

President Johnson: Well, he's unhappy because we're not giving him everything he wants—

Four seconds excised by the National Archives and Records Administration in accordance with the deed of gift.

Daley: Well, I—

President Johnson: And he's got to give up one or the other of his programs: poverty or peace.

Daley: Yes.

President Johnson: And I guess [Bernard L.] Bernie Boutin wouldn't be very imaginative, but he's a good administrator, and he'd be able. If Shriver got out of poverty and went to the Peace Corps, I think that we'd have a lot of agitation from the Adam Clayton Powell [Jr.]s [D–New York] and Roy [O.] Wilkinsons and the damned professionals.

Daley: How long will the agitation be?

President Johnson: I don't know.

Daley: For one day, for one week, for one month? Our concern, and I know yours is, I'm more concerned about the answer to the solution of the problem than I am whether this fellow's up on the platform or that fellow. Because if we can show in another—we've done a fairly good job out here, Mr. President. Shriver said that himself, but he won't say it publicly, that we have the best poverty program in the country. And this is the poverty program—the number one in jobs, number two in education, number three in training, and number four in health. And that's the emphasis we're putting. No fanfare on all these other things; that's fine. But I wouldn't think that if we have the . . .

First, we have to have some guidelines, as you know. There's been no guidelines set out. There's been no direction, so that everyone has been floundering around. But I don't think they're weak. The people still have great confidence in you. I know the people out here in the Middle West and in Chicago [Illinois] still feel very strongly that Johnson is a great president, a good president. He's a dedicated man. He's a devoted man. I don't know, maybe some of those guys in Washington [D.C.] don't think the same way, but we do. And anything you would do along this line wouldn't make any difference at all. What the hell? You're always going to have the Powells in your hair anyhow.

End of excerpt.

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