



“Let’s Don’t Mislead and Deceive People”

Date: 1968-08-26

Conversation: WH6808-01-13313-13314-13315

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: James R. Jones

Participant: Charles S. Murphy

Start Time: 08:04

Duration: 03:47

Place: LBJ Ranch

SCENE SETTER: During the 1968 Democratic convention, President Johnson lobbied covertly via James R. “Jim” Jones and Charles S. “Charlie” Murphy to prevent the party platform from including language that demanded a halt to the bombing of North Vietnam. At the time, Johnson’s advisers told him that a bombing halt would cost American lives unless Hanoi agreed to respect the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating North and South Vietnam.

White House Operator: There you are.

James R. “Jim” Jones: Charlie, I missed that first part. You said you’re working on this thing?

Charles S. “Charlie” Murphy: Yeah, working on this thing with [T.] Hale Boggs [Sr.] [D–Louisiana]. And he has come up with some language that seems to me to be all right, and the Vice President [Hubert H. Humphrey Jr.] will go along with. And Hale would like to—personally to tell you what the language is, and then he would like to talk to the boss about it if that’s necessary.

President Johnson: [*whispering aside to Jones*] Get Charlie to tell you. [*Unclear.*] No, just get Charlie to tell you.

Jones: Charlie?

Murphy: Yeah?

Jones: Why don’t you just go ahead and tell me yourself. Let’s just you and I work.

Murphy: All right. Then this language is: “Stop all bombing of North Vietnam unless this action would endanger the lives of our troops—”

President Johnson: Charlie, it does. We got that positively. Let’s don’t mislead and deceive people. I’d rather be a poor peasant and wear a wooden shoe and be out on the door by myself than to—

Murphy: Well, in that case, why—

President Johnson: The “unless” is no goddamn meaningful ’cause we know it. Read [Creighton W.] Abrams’s wire in front of you. [*Murphy attempts to interject.*] He says that it does.

Murphy: Well, in that case, the language would not call for the bombing to be stopped.

President Johnson: Well, [*chuckling*] that’s right, but why do you want to imply that you’re going to stop it?

Murphy: Uh . . .

President Johnson: You just say to Hanoi something it’d take me a year to explain, and then, they’ll say I’m running away from it.

Murphy: Well, I suppose one consideration is, there’s really a critical situation here at the convention. And looks like that the chairman of the platform committee, who’s sitting here, might not be able to go to his platform committee, except with a disagreement between the President and the Vice President. That he thinks that would be a terrible situation.

President Johnson: Well, the President’s not going to agree to stop all the bombing, Charlie. Period.

Murphy: Uh . . .

President Johnson: Now, I just hate to say that. I’m just like you; I’d rather vote for [Richard M. “Dick”] Nixon than to kill my boy.

Murphy: Well, I’m with you. [*chuckling*] I’m with you. Goddamn it, you don’t want it. But I just don’t think [*unclear*].

Now, Hale is here, and he would like to talk to you.

President Johnson: I don’t want to get into that, [*Murphy acknowledges*] because I don’t want to talk to anybody at the convention. I don’t care what they’d like to do.

Murphy: All right, sir.

President Johnson: I just positively don’t want to do it, and I think you better just say you’re talking to Jim Jones.

Murphy: All right, sir.

President Johnson: That’s why I asked you to go out there. If I wanted to negotiate with each one of these individuals, I’d go out there. I just can’t do it. But I would say to them, if they won’t go for the language that we suggested, which I don’t—I think puts Hanoi off bad enough, then they have to go on their own responsibility, but—which I will not accept and which I—

Break in the tape.

End of excerpt 1.

President Johnson: Now, what they've got to take into account: Do they want to say "Stop the bombing" when the commander tells them that it increases the enemy fivefold and he—our men must retreat? If they do, they can use their language.

Murphy: Right.

President Johnson: If they don't, they ought to use our language.

Murphy: All right.

President Johnson: Now, we're not going to approve anything. We're not going to accept it. Hale says he wants to go and tell them the President's for this. The President's not going to be writing that platform; he told them he wouldn't to begin with.

Murphy: Right.

President Johnson: This is Humphrey's convention, and [Edward M.] Teddy Kennedy's [D—Massachusetts], and whoever he wants to be. If I wanted it to be mine, I wouldn't have withdrawn.

Murphy: Right.

President Johnson: But I'm telling them what our position is as commander in chief that I'm not about to stop this bombing unless they arrest me. And I—take my power away from me [*Murphy acknowledges*] and kill these men when I know it kills them!

Murphy: Right.

President Johnson: Because I've got some of my own right there, and I'm not going to shoot them in the heart!

Murphy: Right.

President Johnson: Not for a bunch of goddamn draft dodgers.

Murphy: All right.

President Johnson: Now, is that clear? Don't you tell them you talked to me at all. You just talked to Jim Jones. But I'm not sure that they understand the reasons behind this.

End of excerpt 2.

CITATION: "Lyndon B. Johnson, T. Hale Boggs Sr., James R. 'Jim' Jones, and Charles S. Murphy on 26 August 1968," Conversation WH6808-01-13313-13314-13315, *Presidential Recordings Digital Edition* [Johnson Telephone Tapes: 1968, ed. Kent B. Germany, Nicole Hemmer, and Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014—).

URL: <http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4006030>

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Full information about this conversation: ["Let's Don't Mislead and Deceive People"](#)