

## WH6402-18-2113\_scroller

**Date:** 1964-02-19

**Participant:** Lyndon B. Johnson

**Participant:** Thomas C. Mann

**Start Time:** 11:32

**Place:** Oval Office

SCROLLER TITLE: "Before It Goes to Hell"

SCENE SETTER: Reviewing Latin America with Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Thomas C. "Tom" Mann, President Johnson made clear that U.S. support for regional development would take place on a quid pro quo basis. Johnson indicated his unhappiness with U.S. policy in the region and its critical coverage in the American press.

**President Johnson:** And I see now we're trying to figure out how to give Mexico some food. And I saw in one of the briefing papers that she wanted water, and we might not be able to give her water, but we could give her food. I don't know I want to be giving away, but I'd damn sure have some things on my Santa Claus list and coordinate them, and then when I did something, I'd make them—got to have a quid pro quo.

**Thomas C. "Tom" Mann:** Well, that's what we've been—that's—

**President Johnson:** I think that you have—I think you've turned a flop in Mexico. I think you've got them to where instead of confiscating everything now, they're trying to promote private enterprise, aren't they?

**Mann:** That's our hope, and they're drifting in that direction. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] We still have a lot of problems. We have to stay with this thing day by day, but I'm not pessimistic about Mexico. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] Got a good President [Gustavo Díaz Ordaz] coming in, and . . .

**President Johnson:** What other places in the hemisphere have you got problems? Argentina? Brazil?

**Mann:** This hemisphere is in worse shape than I've seen it in 20 years. We've got problems in—well, in Bolivia right now, the Cabinet—[Ángel Víctor] Paz [Estenssoro] is the only man there that can hold things together, and his whole Cabinet is splintering in all directions, because they want to be president four years from now.

**President Johnson:** Well, can we get in there and do something to help him before it goes to hell?

**Mann:** We're working on that this morning, and we're coming up with some ideas on that. We've got a possible revolt in the military against the military fellow in Honduras.

**President Johnson:** Yeah.

**Mann:** We're watching that closely.

**President Johnson:** Honduras.

**Mann:** We've got Peru and Argentina about to expropriate oil properties. Brazil is sick. [João Belchior Marques] Goulart is irresponsible. Nearly everywhere we look, we have problems, but I'm sort of optimistic. I think what we did in Panama and Guantánamo is going to help us a lot in the hemisphere, and we need time. We need about—

**President Johnson:** Well, why don't you try to sell this *New York Times* on the problem that you need help? And that this thing you picked up [was] pretty sick, and that you can't do it by just being a floor mop, and you've got to have a little steel in your spine. If you don't, they'll shove you to death. They'll be like a country dog. And see if you can't get the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* to quit taking the line they are.

**Mann:** I'm going to try it, but those fellows are basically hostile to everything you believe in, Mr. President.

**President Johnson:** OK.

**Mann:** The guys that write the stories are. You know, I spent—I had lunch over with the whole staff of the *Washington Post* and made in essence this same pitch, and I was told later that Mrs. [Katharine M. "Kay"] Graham after the lunch said that they ought to give us time to see what we could do. But what you have is a half a dozen very far left-wing guys, like [Daniel H. "Dan"] Kurzman, who are pretty stupid people, really. They don't know anything about Latin America. They don't speak the language, never been there. But they're full of theories. And these guys are crusaders. And how you deal with a crusader is, I think, the toughest problem of all. But I think we're going to have to work on Mrs. Graham. I don't think—

**President Johnson:** Mrs. Graham doesn't have any authority. She won't exercise it. She claims she's the best friend I got, and they murder me every day.

**Mann:** Well—

**President Johnson:** That [Alfred E. "Al"] Friendly runs that paper.

**Mann:** Let me talk to Manny and see if we can't plot something out. I'll get together with him and see if we—do the most effective thing we can.

**President Johnson:** I think you ought to lay the groundwork and say that "now, we need some help on American policy, and we don't think that you're doing your goddamn country a bit of good, and we wished you'd try to help us a little."

**Mann:** All right, sir.

**President Johnson:** OK. All right.

**Mann:** [*Unclear.*]

*End of excerpt.*

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