

1963_1125_K6311_02_12_A Regular Circus

Date: 1963-11-25

Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson

Participant: J. Edgar Hoover

Start Time: 10:30

Place: Executive Office Building

SCROLLER TITLE: "A Regular Circus"

SCENE SETTER: President Johnson called FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to notify him of the course decided on now that Lee Harvey Oswald, the suspect in President John F. "Jack" Kennedy's assassination, had been shot and killed by Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby. Hoover needed no persuasion about the inadvisability of a presidential commission to investigate Oswald's death. Johnson also indicated his exasperation with an expected editorial in the *Washington Post* and shrewdly asked for Hoover's help in countering it.

J. Edgar Hoover: —[Mr.] President.

President Johnson: Two things. Apparently some lawyer [Nicholas deB. "Nick" Katzenbach] in Justice [Department] is lobbying with the [*Washington Post*], because that's where the suggestion came from for this presidential commission, which we think would be very bad—

Hoover: I do, too.

President Johnson: —and put it right in the White House. And we can't be checking up on every . . . shooting scrape in the country.

Hoover: Certainly.

President Johnson: But they've gone to the *Post* now to get them an editorial, and the *Post* is calling up and saying they're going to run an editorial if we don't do things. [*Hoover acknowledges.*] Now, we're going to do two things, and I wanted you to know about it.

One, we believe that the way to handle this is—as we said yesterday, [at] your suggestion—that you put every facility at your command in making a full report to the [U.S.] Attorney General, and then they make it available to the country in whatever form is—seem—may seem desirable—

Hoover: Right.

President Johnson: —as well as the President. Second, with the state—it's a state matter, too—and the state attorney general [V. Waggoner Carr] is young and able, and prudent, and very cooperative with you.

Hoover: Yes.

President Johnson: He's going to run a Court of Inquiry, which is provided for by state law, and he's going to have associated with him—

Hoover: Yeah.

President Johnson: —the most outstanding jurists in the country. But he's a good, conservative fellow.

Hoover: Yeah.

President Johnson: And we don't start invading local jurisdictions [*Hoover acknowledges*] that way. And he understands what you're doing, and he's for it. I wanted you to understand what he was doing, and he's very strong for it. He's going to announce it today. Now, if you get too many cooks messing with the broth, it'd mess it up. And—

Hoover: [*Unclear.*] Yeah, [*unclear*].

President Johnson: —and I think that these two are trained organizations.

Hoover: Yes.

President Johnson: And the attorney general of the state holds Courts of Inquiries [*sic*] every time a law is violated.

Hoover: Yeah.

President Johnson: And the Justice—and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] makes these investigations. So I wanted you to know that, and you ought to tell your press men that that's what's happening.

Hoover: Yeah.

President Johnson: And they can expect Waggoner Carr, the attorney general of Texas, to make an announcement this morning—

Hoover: Yes.

President Johnson: —of a state inquiry. And that you can offer them your full cooperation and vice versa. He'll do it with you.

Hoover: Right. We'll work—we'll both work together on it.

President Johnson: And any influence you got with the *Post*, have them—point out to them that you don't want too many things, and that just picking out a Tom Dewey—lawyer from New York and sending him down on new facts—this commission thing, Mr. Edg[ar]—Mr. Herbert [C.] Hoover [Sr.] tried that. And sometimes a commission that's not trained hurts more than it helps.

Hoover: It's a regular circus then—

President Johnson: That's right!

Hoover: —because it'll be covered by TV and everything else.

President Johnson: Just like an investigating committee.

Hoover: Exactly. I don't have much influence with the *Post*, because I frankly—

President Johnson: I know. [*Chuckles.*]

Hoover: —don't read it. I view it—

President Johnson: [*chuckling*] I know that. I know that.

Hoover: I view it like the *Daily*—

President Johnson: You—

Hoover: —*Worker.*

President Johnson: [*chuckling*] You told me that once before.

Hoover: [*Unclear.*] But . . . I—

President Johnson: But I just want your people to know the facts—

Hoover: Yeah.

President Johnson: —and your people *can* say that, and that kind of negates it, you see?

Hoover: Yes. Yes, we'll—

President Johnson: Thank you.

Hoover: We'll take care of that.

President Johnson: Thank—

Hoover: Thank you, Mr. President.

End of excerpt.

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