



“It’s Starting to Break Down”

Date: 1968-04-06
Conversation: WH6804-01-12910
Participant: Lyndon B. Johnson
Participant: Richard J. Daley
Start Time: 17:19
Duration: 02:45
Place: Mansion

SCENE SETTER: The assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on 4 April 1968 ignited turmoil in cities across America. Chicago mayor Richard J. “Dick” Daley asked the state of Illinois to send in the National Guard and, when that proved inadequate to the challenge, asked President Johnson for American troops.

President Johnson: Hello?

Richard J. “Dick” Daley: Mr. President?

President Johnson: Yes, Dick.

Daley: We’re in trouble. We need some help.

President Johnson: Yes? I was afraid of that.

Daley: Yes. It’s starting to break down in different places.

President Johnson: Yeah.

Daley: And we just met with our people, and they felt that we should try to get some federal assistance. [*President Johnson acknowledges.*] I’ve talked to Governor [Samuel H.] Shapiro, and he’s ready to do anything and everything. So we need it—help—as soon as we can get it.

President Johnson: All right. First thing you ought to do is talk to the Attorney General [W. Ramsey Clark] and see what kind of a finding his legislature’s got to make. [In the] meantime, we’ll—I’ve talked to the Attorney General. I told him I’d called early this morning and told you, because they have to move from California, [*Daley acknowledges*] you see? They won’t do any good tonight.

Daley: Mm-hmm. Well, we [*unclear*]—

President Johnson: That’s why—

Daley: —hope to get them in tonight, if we can.

President Johnson: Well, we—

Daley: Where is Ramsey tonight?

President Johnson: He's right here at the Department of Justice, and I'll switch you over there now, and you can talk to him. But the governor has to for[mally]—*[Daley acknowledges throughout]* you know, the finding they have to make? They have to make a finding in the state that you've used all your Guard, that you've used all your facilities, that you're unable to take care of the situation, and therefore, you ask for federal troops. Then he has to make a finding for the president, and the president has to issue an order. That is to keep a president from doing it except for the . . . at the instance of local officials.

Daley: I see.

President Johnson: Now, that's what I anticipated this morning, *[Daley acknowledges throughout]* and I knew dark was coming, and I knew if we thought we'd better have them, they ought to be moving.

Daley: *[Unclear]*, these fellows kept saying to you, you know, which they will. But now this—we had a meeting—

President Johnson: *[speaking over Daley]* That's what they did to me all day yesterday, and I just cried. *[Daley acknowledges throughout.]* I chew—I ate my fingernails off, and I finally ordered them in on my own while the mayor [Walter E. Washington] couldn't make up his mind. And we got them in, but they got big headlines here today. Here's the—"Too Little, Too Late? Long Stretches of the Capital Laid to Waste; What It Cost: 690 Injured, 299 Fires." So what we'll do is we'll—we will . . . have Governor Shapiro call Ramsey, and I'll have Ramsey alert to the call. He'll be waiting for it.

Daley: All right.

President Johnson: Just tell him to call the White House, and they'll connect him. *[Daley acknowledges.]* That's num[ber]—yeah. Just tell him to ask for the White House in Washington. They'll connect him. He'll tell him exactly what kind of a wire to send. He'll ask him to dictate it.

Daley: Yeah.

President Johnson: And then, in the meantime, I'll see where he can find the troops and how many. Do you know how many they want?

Daley: At least 3,000.

President Johnson: Yeah, well, you better say 5[000].

Daley: Yeah. I think we need 5[000].

President Johnson: I would tell him—

Daley: Fine.

President Johnson: —what you do. And we'll be right back to you, Dick.

Daley: I'll have Shapiro call Ramsey—

President Johnson: That's right.

Daley: —through the White House.

President Johnson: That's right.

Daley: Thanks.

President Johnson: All right.

Daley: Thanks, Mr. President.

President Johnson: Bye.

End of excerpt.

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