



Department of Justice

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PRESS CONFERENCE

OF

ATTORNEY GENERAL RAMSEY CLARK

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Saturday, January 20, 1968

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I appreciate your coming down on a Saturday. I am not going to read all of this material, but I thought I would show you the materials that have been distributed. This will give you some idea of the dimension of materials that have been used.

The reason that I wanted to talk to you this morning was to bring you up to date on our police civil disorders conferences that were announced last month.

You will recall that we said at that time there would be four general conferences of one week each, followed by 10 special conferences. We just completed the first of the four.

Present were about 25 chiefs of police and the executive officers from some of their cities: the mayor or the city manager, depending on the form of city government they might happen to have.

During these four weeks, we expect to have the attendance of chiefs of police and executive officers of roughly 120 major cities of the United States.

Originally, we had invited 125. It was our expectation that perhaps 100 would accept and attend, because these are awfully busy people and a week from their lives is quite a burden on their time and responsibility.

The acceptance rate was much higher than we had expected and, as of this time, it appears that only about three of the 125 may not attend.

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The first four conferences will be followed by 10 regional conferences held in five locations throughout the United States. These places were announced.

These will draw staff police officers, men with line responsibilities, from the same 125 municipal jurisdictions of the United States.

The cities that were invited include all of the largest cities of the United States. If you look at the 1960 census, you will find by going down to the 125th city in population that you reach population centers of about 100,000. So, you can see that included in these comprehensive and intensive conferences are all of the major metropolitan areas of the United States, the bulk of the population of the United States, and all of the areas that have a probability of civil disturbance or disorder.

The conference began Sunday evening last. The chiefs of police were in attendance with national police leadership that was gathered and trained by the International Association of Chiefs of Police under the direction of its Executive Director, Quinn Tamm, who is here this morning.

The chiefs were in classes, so to speak, by themselves through Thursday afternoon or I should say to Thursday afternoon, at which time they were joined by their mayors. The mayors were in attendance from Thursday through yesterday afternoon.

The basic premise and belief of the conference is that riots can be prevented. Our great hope from the conference is that all of the men with the primary responsibility, the chiefs of police of the United States--in part because of these conferences--will have the benefit of the experience and the judgment of their peers in the field.

They will have an opportunity in a quiet environment away from the pressures of their daily existence to think through the particulars of law enforcement in their city and activities for prevention in their cities.

We find that the keynote is planning, intensive planning, and intensive efforts at implementation from now on. It is our expectation that all of the men in attendance will lend their very best efforts to this end.

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In addition to prevention, the conference, of course, dealt in depth with riot control. It is also the premise and the belief of the conference that riots, when they occur, can be controlled.

I think the keynote here is balance; that if the police either underact or overact they can, in a very difficult situation and time in the life of this nation contribute to a problem that is their responsibility to control.

I think these chiefs are very sensitive to this. They realize, I am sure, that the policeman in 1968 is the man in the middle and that his responsibility to this nation is greater than it has been perhaps at any time in our history.

Clearly, police-community relations has emerged as the center of the prevention effort for police departments. It is my impression that the chiefs in attendance were fully committed to this idea. Police-community relations is not police public relations; it is the relations of an entire force in all of its functions with every aspect and element of the citizenry that it serves.

I think these men are vitally aware of this. I think the interchange of ideas over this period of time, the ability to think quietly about their situation in practical terms, to plan and list what they are going to do to meet the problems that they face to prevent riots in their cities--because I think each knows he loses, his city loses, this nation loses if there is a riot in his city--I think this opportunity to think and to plan will carry them forward most beneficially as they get home.

The chiefs will be followed in these 10 conferences that I referred to by their staff people who will engage in a more intensive study of the particulars of their city with the hope for expeditious implementation.

QUESTION: What is the assessment of the Justice Department as to the potential riots situation this summer and how serious it is in your view?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think we have to plan for the worst and work for the best.

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I think fear is a threat, too.

In my judgment, our capability and our ability to prevent and control riots is increasing much more rapidly than the underlying levels of frustration that tend to cause the riots.

Therefore, I am optimistic about our ability. If we have the entire support of communities, the entire support of the city officials, of county officials, of state officials and of federal officials in areas of prevention and control, I believe that we can prevent riots in America this summer, that we can control disturbances when they occur this summer, and we can gain more time to eliminate the conditions that do exist in many parts of the country and in the central city, in what we call the ghetto urban America, to eliminate those conditions which have to be eliminated to bring justice to all Americans.

QUESTION: Mr. Clark, how will you gauge the mood of the police officers that you talk to? Are they vindictive or do you think they may over-react this summer or perhaps not. What is your appraisal?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think they recognize that they will be under intense pressures, that their men will be under intense pressures and pressures from many directions as we go into the summer which tends to be the more critical time.

There will be those who would provoke police and there will be those who would urge them to underact. I think they recognize the need for coolness, for a firmness without fear, and I think they determined to do what they can.

They know it won't be an easy year for the policeman. They believe the year 1968 is the year of the policeman in America and that he will have a responsibility that will affect the future of this country for years to come.

QUESTION: Aren't the departments arming to the teeth? There was an article in the Times the other day showing the municipalities were purchasing arms. Do you think this show of force is wise?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I am not sure it is so wise-spread that it could be characterized as significant. I think there is intense concern. I think there is a ready preparation.

As you read the article, itself, to which you refer, you find the chief of police in Atlanta did not buy the four tanks that were tendered to him which probably means they were not really necessary for the streets of that great city.

QUESTION: Should there be a show of force, though?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: This is a matter of subjective opinion. In my view, the police believe that they have to have a very careful show of force. I think they recognize that an excessive show of force, a show of force too early can, itself, be a provocation--can attract a crowd that itself tends to lead to a riot condition.

On the other hand, they recognize they have to have adequate force at any given time, that no situation can be permitted to get out of control where lawlessness, where destruction of property or looting is permitted without firm, fast police action.

QUESTION: Some militants, Stokely Carmichael among them, really promised violence this summer. What have the police been told in the way of trying to prevent this type of agitation?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think they recognize the importance of identifying leadership that would endeavor to cause violence. I think they recognize police intelligence in this area as of the highest priority, as does this Department. I think they would be determined to move against such leadership wherever a violation of law was found and I think they would move fast and firmly under those circumstances. Without a violation of law they will rely upon their intelligence and their ability to act whenever any violence might occur or any unlawful conduct.

QUESTION: What are the three cities that have not responded?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I don't know. Maybe we can get that for you.

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QUESTION: Mr. Clark, in that connection, how do you feel the Negro leaders in the Negro community--do you feel they are really accepting the leadership of Stokely Carmichael as head of black power and Negro militancy, or do you think these recent meetings he has had here in town are just a show?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I see absolutely no indication that the Negro leadership in the city of Washington is accepting Stokely Carmichael as their leader.

I think just the opposite. They have demonstrated a willingness to listen, a willingness to communicate and apparently in their judgment that is desirable.

QUESTION: What about King and his announced plans to stage a civil disobedience in Washington this spring?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Those plans are somewhat vague in the announcement. If in connection with their execution there is a violation of law, there will be a firm action by law enforcement authorities, taking those who violate the law into custody and before the courts.

QUESTION: Do you take it in his announcement as expressed that there is a threat of a violation of the law per se that is inherent in words of the announcement itself?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Do you mean so that his very statements themselves would be a violation of law?

QUESTION: Not that, but do the plans as announced, if carried out, constitute a potential violation of the law?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: He has said that he is as committed as he has ever been to non-violence, as I understand it, but my information comes from the press. I have not heard from him directly on this subject and I think we would have to act intelligently and wait for further developments.

QUESTION: Mr. Clark, do you see any possibility of a coalition or coming together on the one hand of the civil rights militants and the anti-draft or draft resistance movements? If those two were to come together there would be more trouble.

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ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: There has been, over perhaps a period of 18 months, an indication from time to time that that might happen. My impression is that the probability of it coming to pass are less than it has been in the past. As an illustration, the march on the Pentagon, October 21, reflected a total absence--virtually total absence--of civil rights leadership.

QUESTION: Will this aggravate civil rights disorders this summer? Is there any possibility of this?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think that may be remote. I think that anything that tends to agitate a people can lend to a general ferment, but I don't consider that to be a major factor.

QUESTION: In that connection, Mr. Clark, can you tell us when the Spock and Coffin trials are likely to be held in Boston and also will you comment on Dr. Spock's remarks that it was federal intimidation that lead to the indictment of those five men?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: It is very difficult for me to comment on a legal proceeding. That not only involves professional ethics but really important considerations of justice.

As to the time for the trial, that is up to Judge Ford. I understand that there is an indication there will be some hearings on preliminary motions quite soon. He has not set a trial date and that will depend upon his docket and his ability to hear the case.

As far as Dr. Spock's out-of-court statements are concerned, I can only say that we endeavor in every case to act upon the law and the facts, and we would never seek to intimidate any American citizen by our exercise of responsibilities here.

QUESTION: We have been told to expect more indictments along this line. Can you tell us how many more and when?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: It would depend on how many violations of the law there are. We hope to match the violations with legal action.

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QUESTION: Mr. Clark, have you thought about inviting civil rights leaders to these police meetings?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: There has been considerable thought and discussion given to it. We have not had civil rights leadership as such in attendance at the first meeting.

We will engage in a review and evaluation through most of today and part of tomorrow of the meeting that was just concluded yesterday afternoon, and we will begin the next meeting tomorrow afternoon.

The purpose of the meeting was to bring together chiefs of police to give them time to think through their problems in an environment that would be stimulating, to bring also their mayors because the chiefs' performance depends upon their full and close support.

These men live daily with their cities. They live daily with the leadership of their cities. They are intimately familiar with all elements of the leadership in their cities-- Negro, white, civic, political; all leadership. They do come from some 25 cities so it would be fairly difficult to have any vitally-meaning dialogue that would relate to their cities.

There has been, of course, a constant consideration of the problems of the ghetto. I think there has been a concentration on facing facts. The police must face the facts, the misery and the frustration and the anger and the hatred that does exist in many elements of our society and in many people within the ghetto in America.

They must know themselves, the police must know themselves when they recognize that one policeman on the beat who is unable to control his temper can be a provocation that can undo the work in police-community relations of the entire force. I think they recognize this and they are dealing with these particulars in what appears to me to be-- at least from the several hours I spent with them yesterday morning--a highly constructive method.

QUESTION: Mr. Clark, the other night the President talked about the need for anti-crime legislation. What kind of bill do you personally favor and would you endorse wiretapping provisions?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: In my judgment, the need to build local law enforcement, the need to build state law enforcement and the need to build federal law enforcement far transcends any use of technical equipment, any rule of court as to admissibility of evidence or anything else.

We have neglected law enforcement for decades. We cannot compensate for that now by excessive force or by methods of police action that are incompatible with what a free people would want for themselves, and America had better face the fact.

We have got to provide resources for police. We have to support police. We need more police and better police and I think the two keys the President mentioned in his State of the Union Message in the crime area are both in the field of building police: the Safe Streets and Crime Control Act is designed to build local police and state police; the measures he mentioned to build federal law enforcement in the area of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Bureau of Narcotics, the Bureau of Drug Abuse Control, the United States Attorney's Office which prosecutes and enforces all criminal law--these are the key crime control points from the standpoint of law enforcement.

QUESTION: What about the feeling that the hands of the police are tied?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think this is more psychological than practical in terms of police activity. It is a very complicated subject. You can start talking about confessions, you can start talking about arrest policy, you can start talking about arrest and frisk; all of these things are involved in that controversy. There has to be a balance. There is a limit from both directions and I think the police recognize as their basic need more support: more financial support and more moral support from the citizenry.

QUESTION: Why has the nation neglected law enforcement in the past decade?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I guess out of lack of concern as much as anything else. It is a fact that for all of the police in this nation as estimated by President Johnson's Crime Commission--and when I say all of the police in this nation I mean all of the local police, all of the state

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police, and all of the federal police--we spend \$2.8 billion. At the same time, we spend \$8.8 million for tobacco, and \$12.4 billion for liquor. We need a very substantial increase in devotion of resources to law enforcement.

Any people that would be free and great must live in security and \$2.8 billion does not provide adequate protection for the public.

In my judgment, police salaries are as important, perhaps more important, than any other aspect of our law enforcement problem. I think Director Hoover would agree completely in that.

Until we pay police a salary that will attract the very best among us, that will keep the very best among us; that will not make it necessary for a man who would be a policeman and serve his fellow man--because police work is a public service--to moonlight at night, to drive a cab at night, to work in a cafe at night to support his family; until we pay the police adequately; until we provide adequate funds for research to bring the advantages that science can to detection and all efforts of criminal justice, corrections, courts, we are not doing our duty. We cannot compensate for it by excessive force or unfair methods.

QUESTION: Mr. Clark, did the chiefs or the mayors ask the Federal Government to do anything differently than they did last summer?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: During the course of this conference?

QUESTION: Right.

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I am not aware of it. Two evenings during the week were devoted to programs by federal entities. The Provost Marshal General of the United States, Carl Turner, was down on Monday night of this week and he discussed federal capability and response and coordination if the Army should be needed.

On Thursday night, a group from the President's Commission on Civil Disorders discussed their findings, their conclusions, their general sense of direction with the police. I have not been told as of this time, I was not

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told when I was down there yesterday and participated for several hours with all of the chiefs and mayors in attendance, both in open discussion such as we have in this room and in private conversations with individuals, of any interest or concern that they have about our performance this year as distinguished from last year.

QUESTION: What is the average police salary?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: The average police salary-- we can get you a more specific figure--is right at \$6,000, I think. It will take something more than \$9,000 perhaps for a family of four or five to exist under moderate circumstances.

There is excellent leadership in some departments. The San Francisco Police Department, under the leadership of Tom Cahill, starts a rookie policeman at about \$8,300 a year. That is more than the Department of Justice starts an honor graduate law student with seven years of college training under his belt. I don't argue with the proportion at all.

There are in the United States now some law enforcement agencies that require a college degree to be a deputy sheriff, as in the case of Multnomah County, Oregon, and that reflects an advantage to the entire community served.

On the other hand, there are police departments, and there are many police departments, that start policemen at less than \$5,000 a year, and there are severe limits on what they can hope to earn in a career in police work.

The chiefs of police in your major cities, with their immense responsibility, with just the very large managerial responsibilities that they have, with the very large budgets that they have, are rarely paid--and I am talking about your 10 to 15 biggest cities--as much as \$25,000 a year.

QUESTION: Mr. Clark, you recently talked about computerized intelligence. If there is this computer, do we tend to feed into it the travels of Caremichael, Brown and their lieutenants and, if so, what do we hope to establish from it?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I have not talked about computerized intelligence. I have referred to our intelligence

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efforts, our concern about intelligence, and at least in an internal memo which has had some public visibility, to a new computer capability that we have.

The point is that our intake in items of intelligence is immense. It ranges in the thousands items daily. I am not talking about any particular individual. I am talking about our national intelligence. You have to have immediate recall if the intelligence is to have any value to you. For this reason, we have computerized and we can pull out a pretty big bundle of intelligence in areas that we are able to cover.

question; Will an effort be made to include a showing this summer of where Brown and Carmichael travel trouble followed?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Certainly we will have as a major concern and responsibility in the intelligence area watching all individuals who come to our attention who appear to have extremist, violent capability, and any analysis of their activities that would support law enforcement--that would give it a greater capability to deal with their actions or that would indicate any violation of federal, State or local law--would be highly pertinent to this effort.

QUESTION: Do you have any evidence now which would indicate that any group either foreign or domestic is planning to foment violence in the cities in an organized conspiratorial way?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I think we have to assume, and I think we have some evidence, that in this nation of 200 million people there are some who like to cause trouble. Among those, there are at least a few who would like that trouble to take the form of racial tension and violence. I think it is incumbent upon all of our people, the Negroes and our whites, to see that they fail in that purpose.

Now, as to any massive conspiracy or any intense foreign effort that involves direct action, we have very little evidence to indicate this to be the problem.

QUESTION: You say you have very little. Do you have some and, if so, can you tell us what it is?

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ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: It depends on what you mean by evidence. Circumstantial evidence; we have no hard evidence, no. Our intelligence just about, on this subject, while the quantity is increasing daily, reaches the same conclusion that Mr. Hoover stated before the President's Commission on Civil Disorders back in October.

QUESTION: Sir, for every one of these Stokely Carmichaels and Rap Browns, we must have many, many thousands of Negroes who do not want violence, and white people, too. Isn't there something in a constructive way that we can now be doing as citizens in our own little communities? Do you have any suggestions about how we can work on this?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: Sarah, there are hundreds of things we can be doing both in terms of civil disorders and in terms of crime and lawlessness generally, because all of these things really reflect the character of the people, and what we do as individuals, what we do in our homes, what we do to build strength in our educational institutions which involve over a fourth of all of our people, what we do in our churches--all of these things are of the greatest importance, and we can give you a category as thick--a laundry list, whatever you wish to call it--of projects which can be done. I think a very large part of it is working with youth. I think the police recognize in their total community efforts kids are a key. That is why police athletic clubs and boys clubs and working in the schools and courses like that are becoming more and more prominent activities.

We can have one more question.

QUESTION: In mass demonstrations, Mr. Clark, such as at the Pentagon, what can be done to obliterate the impression of police brutality while still maintaining firmness?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: I am old-fashioned enough to think that the truth will out. I don't think history can stand anything else. I would hope that the press which has the major responsibility in a mass society such as ours to see that the truth wills out, would perform that vital function with great discipline and professionalism.

You know, when things get rough, it depends on our point of view as to whether there is brutality or not. If a guy swings at you and you have a law enforcement responsibility, you have to move firmly.

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In my judgment, and I must have most of the evidence, there was no excessive force and no police brutality used in connection with controlling the crowd at the Pentagon on October 21. That force was used is apparent. I believe that force was necessary is also apparent.

QUESTION: Very quickly, Mr. Clark, several witnesses have testified recently before the President's Commission that riots in 1968 will probably exceed in scope and number those of 1967. Do you agree?

ATTORNEY GENERAL CLARK: It is my business in part to see that that is not true. It is the determination of these conferences to see that it does not come to pass. In my judgment, it is the belief of the Chiefs of Police who have, and have to have, the primary responsibility that it will not come to pass. That is my opinion, too.

THE PRESS: Thank you, Mr. Attorney General

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