



# Department of Justice

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PRESS CONFERENCE  
OF  
THE HONORABLE WILLIAM B. SAXBE  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
WITH  
MEMBERS OF THE PRESS

MECHANICSBURG, OHIO  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1974

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1974

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Attorney General William B. Saxbe made the following statement at his press conference in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, on Sunday, February 3, 1974:

Today we live in a fast changing world. Right now we are in the throes of the truckers' strike. This strike is not by the Teamsters Union in this country. It is not following any patterns that can be negotiated, as with a union. I don't think these people are intentionally vicious law breakers, but they can very well become that.

The thing that we must guard against is these people who say that they are determined to bring this country to its knees. That's pretty seditious kind of talk. They are fighting against a change in their way of life, and I can understand this because I drove a truck once. The type of truck the independent drivers operate is based on cheap gasoline, but that's a way of life that's changing, and they sense this, because cheap gasoline is gone.

The Arab boycott is not the cause of our energy shortage in this country. That's been coming for a long time. The boycott accelerated it -- there's no question about that -- but if the Arabs took the lid off tomorrow, we'd still be facing a serious energy shortage. And so a whole way of life is changing for the independent drivers -- cutthroat competition,

bidding through brokers, having to get a back haul. It's a tough, rugged life.

But when you come right down to basic elements of why we have a government, it's a monopoly on power. We decided a long time ago that rather than have this power in the hands of individuals or groups, it should be in the hands of the government. And a body of law has been put together so that people can enjoy due process of law. Now, what we're faced with today is a group of people who, maybe for the best of reasons, are not employing the strike which is withholding their services, but are trying through terror and intimidation to take over the movement of trucks in this country.

Now I'm calling upon every governor and every law enforcement agency in this country to recognize the danger of this or any other group that wants to pit their strength against the people of this country.

There are members of Congress who are sympathetic, as I am, with the trouble that these people face. I know Congress, I just left there. But there is not one Congressman who will sanction the throwing of a concrete block through the windshield of a moving truck or shooting blindly into a truck, not knowing who's in there, or to drag a woman out of a truck and beat her up as three or four truckers did. If this is the kind of world that they want to live in, we're going to try to put a stop to it.

I am calling on the governors to use the full strength of their authority to apprehend and prosecute these people. And I, as Attorney General of the United States, am calling on every resource that is available to me and every resource available to the peace-keeping forces of this country to see that we do not descend into anarchy.

This is not a strike and I think that should be completely clear. We have machinery to deal with strikes passed by the Congress and tested and sanctioned by the courts. This was set up for the purpose of peace keeping.

But here you have leaderless organizations, sponsored by people who, perhaps for their own best interest, are aggravating an already serious situation, people who are fighting against a change in their way of life, perhaps trying to turn the clock back. I don't think these people want to be vicious; I don't think they want to go to the penitentiary, and I don't want to think they want to beat up women. But this is the kind of heat that develops and, believe me, it's time to meet it head on.

And if the governors in this country do not have the guts to face up firmly to this situation, it'll get worse and people will be killed. There'll be destruction of property, because we must have food and fuel and the lanes of commerce must be kept open in this country, and we're determined to do it.

Attorney General William B. Saxbe answered the following questions regarding the truckers' strike at his press conference:

Question: What action do you advocate to face up to this situation?

Attorney General Saxbe: Whatever amount of power is needed.

Question: The National Guard?

Attorney General Saxbe: This is up to the individual governor. And in Pennsylvania they have seen fit to call out the National Guard. In Ohio, they have not yet. I keep thinking that the reasonable people don't want to pull their house down on them. They own trucks and they have to pay on their mortgage. I realize the situation they're in, but they sure can't pay on it if that truck is towed away and confiscated.

Question: If the governors don't act, and Governor Shapp seems to be the only one who has so far, will your Department step in?

Attorney General Saxbe: Our Department has no more police than the City of New York. It would be impossible for the FBI or any federal agency to do this. But I'll use whatever power I have, and that includes the power to go to court.

I have advised the United States Attorneys in every district in the country to use whatever means they have, and that includes using court orders to seize vehicles that are used in illegal activities and to go at it from the civil rights approach, because the ultimate deprivation of civil rights is to kill somebody.

Some of them are claiming they will bring this country to its knees. I'm not taking that as seriously as some are because I think there are enough reasonable people involved in this to see the course that it leads them to. These people don't want to be outlaws, but that is rapidly what they are becoming.

Question: Mr. Attorney General, do you believe there's been a dereliction of responsibility up to now in those states where the National Guard has not been called out?

Attorney General Saxbe: I don't know. Perhaps there are states that can handle it. Perhaps the city police and the sheriffs can. But everybody has a stake in this and if people continue to be injured, if transport is stopped, the states have the means to see that this action is stopped.

(Next five questions, unrelated to the truckers' strike, are omitted)

Question: Mr. Saxbe, a moment ago, you said that you did not want to see the truckers send this country into anarchy. My question -- Does it look that serious?

Attorney General Saxbe: No, it doesn't. And as I say, I think there are reasonable men who will not go this far. But when statements are made that they're going to bring this country to its knees, that may be puffing, but it serves notice on us that if these truckers are going to follow those kinds of leaders, then they're going to demand more and more violence from them,

because that's the only way they can do it -- by violence. The Teamsters themselves want to work and they haul most of the freight.

Question: Again, what action can the Justice Department take to head off the situation?

Attorney General Saxbe: Well, there are many actions that we can take. First, the interfering with interstate commerce, interfering with the civil rights of people. As you know, this is an important part of the law. Other areas, such as illegal use of the citizens' ban radios, all of these things can be classed in the area of federal jurisdiction -- and then, of course, seditious activity itself. If it reaches the point where they are actually trying to take over control of an area, then you have a confrontation. You will have the local police involved originally, but we're searching for every means possible . . . .

Question: What about electronic surveillance?

Attorney General Saxbe: Well, on the Citizens' Band, that's pretty easy because you just tune in. Electronic surveillance has been pretty badly eroded. Every case of electronic surveillance or telephone tapping is reported to the courts, that is the Office of the Courts in the United States. There are ten states that now engage in this -- and the federal government -- and there were less than a thousand cases of electronic surveillance in the entire country last year. I don't think that that is an important thing here, but it is a tool of law enforcement that we should not abandon, however.

Question: Most of the truckers, Mr. Saxbe, do not have FCC permits for the Citizens' Band radios in the first place. Why hasn't there been a crackdown on the use of those since they are obviously a tool in this organization?

Attorney General Saxbe: I don't think it was something that was apparent until recently. Again, I say, they seem to be willing to take the law into their own hands. They want a frontal confrontation and I guess they are going to get it.

Question: What is it that you have in mind when you say that?

Attorney General Saxbe: Well, with the city, county, state authorities, and if need be, the National Guard of these states, plus what input we can put into it. And as I say, I'm calling on the governors not to sit back and let this get out of hand -- or the city police or the county police -- to move before we have hundreds of people injured, killed, or otherwise hurt and whole cities deprived of fuel and food.

Question: I heard a network report saying -- I don't know where they got the information -- that during this coming week in Ohio, hundreds of thousands would be unemployed -- where they got that figure I have no idea -- but also supermarket people are saying that if it goes a week, and they were saying this as of last Thursday, they are going to have a lot of bare shelves in their supermarkets. If it goes a week, then would it be time for you to step in? If it goes to that point?



Attorney General Saxbe: Well, I don't think it should go this far. But I can't step in. I have no army. We have the FBI and they're great on investigations and I assure you that this investigation will continue long after this strike is over, and we will find those people who are violating federal law if it takes five years. If they think they are going to get in and out of this on a free ride, I want to tell them right now they are not. If they're violating federal law, they're going to be pursued and I hope those who are now violating state laws are apprehended and prosecuted because we're having a confrontation and you cannot have a government run this way. Now, somebody said what about the miners over in Britain, bringing that country to its knees. There's a great difference. Anybody can strike. I can't make you go to work in that coal mine. Any of these drivers can withhold their services. They can park that truck and walk away and forget about it. But what I'm talking about is when they go on that highway and shoot and maim and kill people on a frontal attack. Upon the authority of this country, that is an entirely different proposition, and, as I say, there is no Congressman, there is no one in a position of responsibility in this country -- at the state or local level -- who will tolerate this.

Question: Obviously, you're pretty close to the truckers situation, and I would like your estimation on how long it would take at the present rate we're going to bring this country to its knees if nothing is done in terms of gasoline drying up, food shortages, and supplies dwindling?

Attorney General Saxbe: That's not going to happen. I don't think the governors or the mayors are going to permit this to happen.

Question: All of you have done nothing to insure that it's not going to happen thus far . . .

Attorney General Saxbe: I'm calling on them today to recognize the threat that it is and put a stop to it right now. If these people want to be criminals, if they want to go to the penitentiary, we're going to give them that opportunity.

Question: Aside from the violence, how can you make an independent driver drive a truck?

Attorney General Saxbe: There's no way. And he's perfectly within his legal right to withhold his services, But what I'm talking about is the man who wants to drive his truck. You can do anything you want to within your legal right, but when you interfere with my rights, that is where the government gives you protection, gives me protection. When you interfere with my rights, and certainly when a man is shooting at you or throwing a concrete block through your windshield, or in any other way trying to interfere with your rights, this is what society is set up to protect people against. And the people in this country are not going to tolerate it. And the worst thing that could happen, if they give up on the enforcement of law by their constituted authority is to take the law into their own hands. Then we really are going to have violence because this handful of truckers are not going to have violence because this handful of truckers are not going to bring this

country to its knees.

Question: You say you are calling on the governors to take some action -- that's kind of vague, though. What kind of action do you think they should take?

Attorney General Saxbe: When a man breaks the law, I can't go down and tell the policeman what to do. It's obvious. It means putting it on the front burner. I don't think that if someone throws a rock through the windshield, I should go out there and tell that policeman how to arrest that man or how to apprehend him.

Question: Do you think the law enforcement officers around the country -- the local ones -- are doing their job regarding the truckers?

Attorney General Saxbe: I think that the local law enforcement people in this country are capable of maintaining the peace of this country if they get the support that they need.

Question: And you are going to give it to them?

Attorney General Saxbe: I'm going to give it to the full extent I can. And I'm calling on the governors and those others in authority at the county and local level to make this the prime objective of the next week.