

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

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Description: In this segment, ER interviews reporter Vincent Sheean about his book *Lead, Kindly Light*.

Participants: ER, Vincent Sheean

[ER:] Thank you, Anna. Our guest this afternoon, Mr. Vincent Sheean, has a faculty for being where things are happening. A most invaluable faculty for one whose chosen work is reporting on current events. Mr. Sheean's experience has been as global as the news during the past fifteen years. He's been at the scene of most of the world-changing happenings of these years, beginning with Mussolini's march on Rome. His war service with the United States Air Force took him to North Africa, Sicily, Italy, the China-Burma-India theater, Austria, and Germany. And when the United Nations held its first session in San Francisco, Mr. Sheean was there. But today I should especially like to discuss with Mr. Sheean his journey to India two years ago and its results. One of those results is his latest book *Lead, Kindly Light* which came out this month. Why did you name it that, Mr. Sheean?

[Vincent Sheean:] In the first place, uh Mrs. Roosevelt, it was Gandhi's favorite hymn, and that alone would not have uh determined the choice but the text of the hymn itself is rather suitable to the-to the uh mood, let's say, of the book [Vincent Sheean clears throat]. It was Gandhi's favorite hymn in the sense that although he was not himself a Christian, he was a Hindu, of course, he had come under Christian influence early in life and that among other Christian hymns had come to mean a great deal to him. And at the beginning and end of every fast or every great decision that he made this hymn was sung by those of his family and surrounding him.

[ER:] That's interesting to me because it's my favorite hymn. What led you to India and to Mahatma Gandhi?

[Vincent Sheean:] I suppose bewilderment, more than anything else. Uh, bewilderment about the United Nations and about war and peace and the results of our war, uh which had seemed to me to be a righteous war and which appeared to produce disastrous results.

[ER:] Well, uh did you find in India and in meeting Gandhi, what you went to find, Mr. Sheean?

[Vincent Sheean:] Not altogether, of course, but I did find in the- in the answers which Mr. Gandhi gave to me, to these questions, I did find clues which, if pursued further, might lead to some kind of uh enlightenment.

[ER:] I don't wonder it was bewildering to you, because to me you're so-- the whole background as you come in contact with the people from India is very bewildering. Um, but I'm interested that Gandhi was able to help you uh find some of the answers. I like very much the passage from William James which you quote in the forward to your book. The passage which states that, "What we now need to discover in the social realm is the moral equivalent of war. Something heroic that will speak to men as universally as war does and yet will be as compatible with their spiritual selves as war has proved to be incompatible." Do you think we can and will discover such a thing--a moral equivalent of war?

[Vincent Sheean:] I now believe that it's possible. I think that it was demonstrated in India and that Gandhi found such a thing. Uh what William James [Vincent Sheean coughs] is talking about in this uh

passage in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is uh the fact that war does make an appeal to the young. Unfortunately. Unfortunately the minute war is declared, no matter for what reasons, between what nations, or under what circumstances, the young respond. There is some kind of appeal to war. Now he says--

[ER:] sacrifice--

[Vincent Sheean:] Yes. It's that uh excitement that they get. And offering themselves. Now uh he says if we can find a moral equivalent to that, in peace, g-get the same--e-extract from him the same spirit in peace, uh then we have the moral equivalent of war, which is the only thing that can save the situation, not agreement. Now, uh it appears to me that in India Gandhi di-Gandhi did that. He got his young people uh into a state where they were willing to do in peace what in many nations the young are willing to do in war.

[ER:] Well it interests me that in your book you speak of non-violence as a terrifying weapon, the only weapon able to contend with the atom bomb on anything like equal terms. I wish you'd explain to me what you mean by non-violence.

[Vincent Sheean:] Well of course I don't say that this would ever work in the West, but as it worked in India, non-violence consisted of uh a refusal to support the organs of the state, that is to have anything to do with the post--the collection of post or tax collection or any of the other machinery of the state.

[ER:] And uh, so you really stop the whole machinery of the state?

[Vincent Sheean:] You stop the machinery by people simply staying at home and praying and fasting and so on.

[ER:] That would be hard to do though, in the West.

[Vincent Sheean:] That would be very difficult to do in the West in that way.

[ER:] I wonder if there is any question you'd like to ask me because our time is drawing short and I'll try to answer it.

[Vincent Sheean:] I should like to ask you, Mrs. Roosevelt, this--uh, which to me is a very serious question. Do you believe that a woman could, or should be president of the United States?

[ER:] Well I've answered that a good many times, sir. To me, of course there would be very little use in a woman uh being president until she could really command a following. There's not much use in um having power uh if people won't follow you. And uh it seems to me that a woman could be president um uh nothing would prevent her from being. But, whether her being president would accomplish anything valuable uh, I rather doubt at present, because as yet, I don't think enough women have held positions uh so that we've reached a point where we can think uh of both men and women as people fit to do a job. And therefore followed because they can do that job and they know about it and they are leaders in that way. The day we reach that point, then it doesn't matter whether you elect a man or a woman, but until you do, it does matter, because nothing would be achieved by a woman who is named president and couldn't command a following. And now, thank you Mr. Sheean, for being our guest, and back to my daughter Anna in Hollywood.

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