MRS. ELEANOR ROOSEVELT’S OWN PROGRAM

June 27, 1940

Description: Broadcast time 1:15-1:30 over the NBC Red Network. ER discusses suggestions from listeners about the best way to increase usefulness and service by American citizens. Topics include how to aid refugee children, creating a civilian training corps, and increasing crop production.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Ben Grauer, NBC Announcer

(30:40)

[Ben Grauer:] This is Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program presented by the makers of SweetHeart Soap.

[Theme music 30:45-31:10]

[Ben Grauer:] Attention America, it’s time for our regular Thursday visit with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Today Mrs. Roosevelt joins us from New York where she is ready to greet her many friends. But before I turn the microphone over to our gracious visitor, may I remind you that these programs come to you with the compliments of SweetHeart Soap, a favorite American beauty soap for half a century. And now, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.

[ER:] Good day ladies and gentlemen. In the many years that I’ve been interested in and connected with public affairs, I cannot remember a single time when people wanted more ardently to be of service to their country. Men, women, and even children are anxious to serve in any way they can. And yet, there seems to be no very evident way in which their energies may be harnessed. The result is that the more energetic citizens are thinking up plans of their own and trying in every way to get people to adopt their ideas. This unfortunately may have some rather curious and haphazard results. All of us must understand that in a country as large as ours, effort must be organized. Plans must be worked out carefully in a unified program, people’s activities and resources must be coordinated either under the government or under a few well-organized private agencies working in cooperation with each other and with the government.

In the meantime it seems to me that the obvious course of action for most of us is to go on with our own jobs, whatever they may be. If possible, we should try to do our selected tasks a little better than before. Wherever it lies in our power, we should try to give work to somebody else. A man or a woman who is unemployed, a girl or a boy without a job can never be happy because they feel that they’re a drag upon the country rather than an asset. We must recognize that there is something wrong with an economy which does not supply every able-bodied citizen who is willing to work with some gainful employment at a living wage.

Since our economy is out of joint, the government must step in until we get it going again. The nationwide, spontaneous desire to be of service to the country is nothing more than the will of a democracy to preserve itself. It is true that the first step in preserving democracy is to see that every single citizen has an opportunity to earn a livelihood. A second, and equally important step, is to build up in each of us a sense of responsibility for all the others. (34:04)

During the past weeks, I’ve been flooded with letters from people in every part of the country suggesting ways in which we can increase our usefulness. Some of them are excellent, some impractical,
and some amusing. For example, one writer sponsors the idea of a thirteenth column to represent our thirteen original states. This plan would be very amusing if there were not an element in it which may be very dangerous. The writer suggests that every one of us should appoint himself or herself as a committee of one to listen to orators and others who express themselves in public. Each of these committees should then decide whether the speaker is abusing his right of free speech. Unfortunately, too many of us have different ideas of the meaning of free speech. Too many of us reserve the right of free expression for ourselves alone and deny it to others. I’m afraid that the kind of thinking behind such a plan may lead to many troubles.

Ever so many people have written to me expressing a desire to take care of refugee children. Some of them want only French children, but it is quite obvious now that it is impossible to get these unfortunate youngsters out of the France. Some want children from other countries which are equally impossible to reach at the present time. Everyone seems to feel that these children can be dropped into this country without the slightest difficulty. Unfortunately this is not the case, but I hope that everyone who is interested in helping the innocent young European victims of the war will get in touch with the US Committee for the Care of European Children. With temporary headquarters in Gramercy Park Hotel, New York City, this committee has been formed to bring children from England via Canada. Some of these children will be of other nationalities because they’ve left their native country to take refuge in England. (36:12)

There are many complications in bringing refugee children to this country with which the average person may not be familiar. The immigration laws have to be observed, standards have to be set up for the homes that these children will live in, there has to be supervision in each home to ensure good treatment and proper care. This is one piece of work which I’m sure will absorb much of the energy now clamoring to expend itself in some service to the government. And this brings us to the halfway point in our talk for today and it’s time for us to listen to a few words from Mr. Grauer.

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt. Ladies, if you wanted a red hat with a brim and a veil you wouldn’t buy one hat because it’s red, and a second one because it had a brim, and still another hat for the veil, you’d insist on one hat that had all three. And it’s just as easy to get one bath and beauty soap that meets not just one or two but all of your needs, just ask for SweetHeart Soap. It’s gentle to help skin stay soft and smooth, it’s thorough to remove clinging surface impurities that make skin look dull and older, and SweetHeart’s lovely, mild fragrance lingers to keep you fresh and sweet long after a SweetHeart bath or clean up. Remember SweetHeart Soap gives you all three of these important aids to loveliness. Yet pure, delicately fragrant SweetHeart costs only a very few pennies a cake. Bear this in mind the next time you buy soap, and accept no substitute when you ask for SweetHeart Soap. And here again is Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. (37:54)

[ER:] In another letter which I recently received, a well-meaning and public-spirited lady suggests that we undertake to increase our food supply by growing crops on every available piece of land. Such a suggestion may seem at first to have a great deal of value, but closer study shows that it does not take into account our complete national picture. I’m afraid that this idea would not meet with the entire approval of the secretary of agriculture because we now have surpluses in many types of food. We even have a surplus of cotton. Have some of you been asked to wear cotton stockings? There is an ample supply to meet the present or future needs of Europe as well as our own. This holds true even if many refugees can be brought here, although this does not seem likely at present. (38:47)

Because the food supply is so closely related to world trade, we cannot entertain the idea of growing more crops without considering the future of American exporting. If the war in Europe does not end soon, we will not be allowed to trade with the greater part of Europe. If the war does end soon, we still do not know whether any kind of general trade will again return to the world.
I want to be most careful in criticizing the suggestions which have been sent to me. It is a beautiful idea that we should plan ahead, it is wonderful that people all over the country should be thinking along these lines, but we should remember that much planning for the future has already been done. It would be a pity to waste our national energy in increasing our food supply, for example, when there is at present sufficient reserve to meet any generous impulse we may have or to engage in any kind of trade that may be possible.

To demonstrate further how some suggestions for our national welfare can misuse our national energy, I should like to tell you about another letter I’ve received. A lady suggests that we engage retired army officers to drill all the women in the country. Isn’t it obvious that those of us who are able to cook would do better to improve our cooking than to learn how to be soldiers? National emergencies call for the best efforts of every citizen in their own special fields. I can see how calisthenics or any physical development which would improve the health of our boys and girls and older people might be valuable, for health is certainly one of the things which I think is a vital part of a defense program. And speaking of public health, it seems to me that many of us might put our minds to the problem of securing better medical care for all of our people, so that we would be better fitted to meet any unusual strain which we might be asked to endure.

One generalization which I might make about all the suggestions I’ve received in the mail is this: let us look to the improvement of America and Americans first. For example, the tragedy which has come to the children of Europe is dramatic enough to appeal to people who’ve known little or nothing about the tragedy which faces many of our own children and their mothers and fathers in this country. I hope that bringing some of the refugee children to this country and placing them in various communities will serve to point up for some of us the conditions which face our own children. I can quite well understand the feelings of the people who say, “Why is there so much excitement about saving Europe’s children when comparatively little has been done to save our own?” The answer, of course, is that the tragedy in Europe has come more quickly and is so forcibly brought to us through the press, radio, and newsreels that it cannot be ignored. It must arouse the sympathy of a warm-hearted nation. Many people can live a long while in a community and not know that nearby live other people who are in dire need. Perhaps those very people will become aware of the conditions that have remained hidden in their own communities by seeing the conditions under which our foreign children are allowed to live.

I know there’s been a feeling of discouragement among many people because democracy achieves reform slowly, but I still feel that this arises from a lack of knowledge which keeps us as a nation from being really unified in our efforts to improve the democratic way of life. In other words we do not know each other. We have ignored conditions which endanger democracy in our homes and in our own communities, but the brightest hope that I see ahead, and it may be a real salvation, is that the dangers which face us today may draw us together. The conflict in the world around us may force us to know our homes, our communities, our nation, and thus compel us to grow into a unified country ever improving our democracy. (43:18)

[Ben Grauer:] Thank you very much, Mrs. Roosevelt. Friends, summertime is soap and water time. The long, hot days call for plenty of extra baths and clean ups, and this makes it extra important to choose your summer beauty soap carefully. Now, I’m going to describe the ideal soap for this time of year. I’m sure you can guess its name. First, your soap must be pure so it will agree with your skin through all those extra scrubblings. Second, it must be thorough so it will effectively dispose of ugly, unpleasant surface impurities. Third, it must be delicately fragrant because you want to be radiantly clean and attractive. Now what one fifty-year favorite soap offers you all three of these summer beauty needs? Well, you’re absolutely right, it’s SweetHeart Soap. Well, all I have to say now is this: make gentle, thorough SweetHeart Soap your bath and beauty soap this summer, and see if you don’t say “There’s no other soap like it.”
[Theme music 44:19-44:36]

[Ben Grauer:] [Music continues softly] And this brings to a close another friendly visit with Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Mrs. Roosevelt comes to call again next Tuesday at this same time. Be sure to have your radio tuned to this station. And remember to ask your dealer for the fine product that brings you these programs: SweetHeart Soap, famous for fifty years as the soap that agrees with your skin. And now, it’s goodbye until next Tuesday when you’ll again hear [music crescendos, cuts] Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt’s Own Program. This is Ben Grauer speaking.

[NBC Announcer:] This is the National Broadcasting Company.

[NBC Chimes]

(45:18)