

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

May 18th, 1951

Description: This recording was produced while ER was in London, England. In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss India's attitude toward Western and Soviet imperialism. In the interview segment, ER and Robert Boothby, a Conservative Party member of the House of Commons discuss the British Labour Party's recent split.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Robert Boothby

[ER:] How do you do? This is ER speaking to you from Europe, where I am attending a meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yesterday on Mrs. Roosevelt's interview from London you heard Mister W.E. Elwyn Jones, a Member of Parliament in the Labour Party. Today's guest, Mr. Robert Boothby, is also a Member of Parliament but a member of the Conservative Party. It will be interesting to hear the opposition's comments on the Labour Party's recent split. We'll come to the interview with Mister Boothby after a special discussion between Mother and myself. Now let's hear from the sponsors who make our recorded program possible.

(Break 00:52-1:02)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, the question that I have to ask of you today is a question concerning the Eastern distrust of the West, as revealed at a conference that took place in Bombay, India recently and I'll quote from uh an English newspaper, The London Times, and its dispatch, which I believe is very interesting. Uh in this dispatch they say, 'The Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom, which opened here on Wednesday and ends today, was meant to take place in New Delhi. The decision of the Indian government to ban it from the capital because a communist sponsored peace congress had just been forbidden is a significant example of the neutralist attitude in India which treats Russia and America as though they represented equal threats to Indian freedom. Delegates from abroad were James Burnham, Editor of the Coming Defeat of Communism; Norman Thomas, the American Socialist Party presidential candidate; Hermann Muller, the uh gene-geneticist and Nobel Prize winner; and Max Jurgin, the Head of the National Negro Congress; Professor Julius Margolin, the Polish Jewish writer; Salvatore dam-madi-mad [ER and Elliott together: Madariaga], and W.H. Ardon and myself, myself being Steven Spender.

The discussions in the section of the congress devoted to threats to freedom were most revealing to the fraternal delegates from abroad, while writers, teachers and students showed surprising friendliness toward the England of 1951. It is also apparent that totalitarianism meant to them the regime under which they lived before they had achieved independence, and that the idea of American imperialism is now skillfully equated by the communists with the British imperialism from which India has been freed. Although a great many anti-communist speeches have been made, it is amazing how many Indian intellectuals, even while deploring Soviet policy and expressing horror at conditions in labor camps, are influenced by the communist point of view. One delegate said that the conditions described by professor Margolin, who spent five years in concentration camps near the White Sea after the German occupation of Poland, were no worse than those of workers in the assembly line in the Ford factories at Detroit. The best propaganda for the communists is, however, conditions in India itself: the terrible poverty of millions of people. And the best propaganda against America is the discussion in the United States Congress, which holds up the delivery of grain promised to this country. Intellectuals in India and in other parts of Asia would probably be less impressed by arguments that there is no intellectual freedom in Russia if they

thought the Soviet methods could solve these problems of poverty. So arguments by James Burnham that totalitarianism means the total destruction of free culture perhaps have less weight than those of Hermann Muller, who reasoned in a powerful and practical way that theories like those of Lysenko obstruct the usefulness of science. Now that is the article which I would like to have you discuss today on our program because I think it represents the Eastern point of view, the point of view of the Asiatic nations and is one that I think is very important for us in America to come to grips with. (5:38)

[ER:] Well, I don't believe that there are many people in America who have come in contact with the suspicions of the Far Eastern, Indian and Near Eastern peoples um and neither do they know what the good propaganda can be made by the USSR in countries where hunger and poverty have long been with the people, have ridden the people for generations. And therefore when they are promised um a change in these conditions and it is pointed out to them that through the years the nations that might have made a great effort and brought about a change haven't done so, it's easy to believe that these nations—uh particularly the one at present that is looked upon as having everything—lacks in interest and in sympathy and in understanding. And it's very easy propaganda for the USSR to say um, "What you know um about our promises, you haven't given us a chance to show you what we can do, whereas you won't try our system, whereas um you've had Great Britain right here for generations and look at where you are today." I've had um I've had people say to me um, "All these years Great Britain has been in India and look at the education of the people," and there's not much you can say about that because the people are quite evidently um lacking in educational facilities.

Now Great Britain of course will say that she did what she could do, but she was up against a problem which was so great that she couldn't solve it. Now India is trying to solve it um herself and it's not proving to be easy and it probably won't be easy, it will probably take a very long time. I-I can quite understand however the suspicion of the nations um of the West, of those that they feel have been imperialistic nations either through uh colonial exploitation or through business exploitation. Uh I think it's a mistake to take the situations of the past and accept them as the situations of the present without making any allowances for changes that have come about in the West in the past few years in their thinking. Uh but that's a good deal to expect um when both intellectuals um and the people themselves are faced with such problems that someone who comes along and offers them a philosophy and an immediate alleviation of uh financial difficulties through a new type of economy, naturally um is very plausible. It doesn't um—it doesn't mean that if it was accepted and put into practice it would find in actual achievement any quicker results, but the USSR has been in some ways much more intelligent than the nations of the West in propaganda. When they agree that they will give a nation wheat, it is there within the shortest possible time after the agreement. I think the article is quite correct in saying that one of the worst things that could have happened, one of the things that has played most into the hands of the communists is the long discussion in our own Congress as to whether we would give or lend or send under any circumstances— (10:41)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Or sell on credit—

[ER:] The wheat that was asked of us as a gift to India. I think it would have been the best propaganda had that wheat gone immediately and-and—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] The terms decided later.

[ER:] Well I-I think it would have been better to be in a gift. We had the wheat. It's true that now there is question of whether our-our-our own wheat yield this year is going to be so good that we will have as much as we want. But I-I think probably if we had been as clever propagandists as the USSR, we would have realized that we who know how to use corn, even if we were a little short of wheat, could have got along on corn on—we did it in World War One, we could do it again for a short period of time. And I

think that we really should weigh what we do in terms of the effect it has on the largest population area in the world.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I think that's a very powerful note on which to end our question and answer period of today, which is not based on a question written in by listeners but largely on what I read in foreign newspapers on this trip of ours to Europe. And I must say that I think that it is a very important thing for our people at home to listen to, and now we'll go onto another part of our program as soon as we've heard from our announcer.

(Break 12:36-12:49)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Again Mrs. Roosevelt and I are in the studios of the British Broadcasting Cooperation in London for an interview with a distinguished Member of Parliament who will explain some of the problems of Great Britain and Europe today. And here is Mrs. Roosevelt, who will introduce her guest.

[ER:] Thank you Elliott. Being in London again today gives me the opportunity and pleasure of having as my guest Mr. Robert Boothby. Mr. Boothby has been a conservative member of the House of Commons for twenty-six years. He comes from Aberdeenshire, Scotland and has held many important political assignments in that country. He is a member of the Council of Europe, having worked closely with Winston Churchill on his plans for a united Europe. I'm happy to introduce to you Mr. Robert Boothby.

[Robert Boothby:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt I feel honored, and am delighted to be here.

[ER:] That's very nice, Mr. Boothby. As a Conservative, what would you say is the significance of the recent political crisis which involved the dramatic exit of Mr. Aneurin Bevan from the Labour government?

[Robert Boothby:] Well of course there's more to it than dentures and spectacles. That I think—

[ER:] So I gathered, roughly!

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]

[Robert Boothby:] That I think is uh-is-is the peg on which he hung his resignation upon, but he very quickly widened the field and in his resignation speech he attacked a whole range of government policy. Now I think there's two implications of this. First of all and perhaps more important than anything else, I feel that the impetus and inspiration of the Labour Movement at this moment is spent. That they had a great impetus and inspiration in the Parliament of 1945 to '50 was obvious even although you might not have agreed with it, it was there and carried them right on. Now I think that's done, I think they're tired, I think they don't know what to do or where to head for. All they see ahead of them is rising prices, and I think Mr. Bevan probably thought it wasn't a bad moment to get out from under. But of course it's also a deep split in the Labour movement, which is bound to have long term repercussions. They've got to—when they go into opposition, as I think they're going very soon into opposition—they've got to have a long struggle with themselves, and a long argument with themselves and recapture the faith and the enthusiasm they once had in them and now I think lost.

[ER:] Well you-you seem very sure in your forecasting but I noticed that uh Mr. Bevan was received with a good deal of-of uh enthusiasm in Scotland.

[Robert Boothby:] Well you see Mrs. Roosevelt, the more he's received with enthusiasm at the moment the better pleased I am, [ER laughs] cause it-it means the split in the Labour Movement is even deeper than I'd thought.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] When you say that uh the Labour government is going into opposition, for the benefit of this American audience who we're talking to, would you mind explaining what that means?

[Robert Boothby:] Well I simply mean that we're going to have a general election fairly soon [Elliott Roosevelt: How soon?] and that my side's going to win. (15:53)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] How soon do you think?

[Robert Boothby:] Well I should say at the very latest in October, but if there's a-a nasty division for them on Tuesday, might come next week but I-I don't [ER: and] think, I think it's October.

[ER:] And-and you really, you seem quite confident. You see this sounds to me so like much of the discussion that goes on at home between the Republicans and the Democrats, and I sometimes wonder in both England and America there seems to me to be a division even within both parties, because you've now had um in the Labour Party a division um which deep down is a fear that some of the welfare measures that um undoubtedly uh were the impetus they're behind and that uh will-will uh be dwarfed by the need for defense.

[Robert Boothby:] Well that-that of course is really what it comes to. It's the old argument of guns or butter. And I do appreciate and sympathize with Aneurin Bevan's anxieties about the inflation and above all about the raw material problem.

[ER:] Well you see at home eh we have something that is um I think rather similar, because when whatever party is in power um suppose the Conservatives come in, there are a good many things they won't change.

[Robert Boothby:] Oh an awful lot.

[ER:] And you will have uh-a-a division eh in-in your party just as the Labour Party has, perhaps not as deep, but you have it just as in our Republican Party at home there is that same division between uh the people who don't want to go so far and the people who want to go further and as there is in the Democratic Party. It's-it's very interesting to me that um I don't think we have a clear cut um actual division in the parties either in Great Britain or in the United States anymore.

[Robert Boothby:] We shall certainly have our divisions, but the difference between us and the Labour Party is that we will keep quiet about them. The Labour Party have open disagreements, openly arrived at. And if we have agreements in-in our party we try to kill them in private and reach some decision privately, and when the decision's been reached—and that's perhaps the most important thing-thing of all—we-we usually all play on the same side, whatever we may have argued about in private, we always accept the decision and go forward together. In fact I don't see how you can run a democratic country or a democratic party on any other basis. Argue the thing out, come to a decision and then all line up behind the decision.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. (18:38)

[ER:] Well of course that-that's uh a good way to keep a party together. Now uh I'd like to ask you something. How would the conservatives handle the raw materials shortage questions that are now so important?

[Robert Boothby:] Well I think the short answer is in two words: with you.

[Everyone laughs]

[ER:] Well!

[Robert Boothby:] Now I don't think there's any other way of doing it. I uh I-I'm told that Mr. [Richard] Stokes is now going to the United States but Mr. Somebody should have gone to the United States long ago, and I think that nothing could have pleased the-the Kremlin more in recent eh months than to see the Western democracies embarking upon a rearmament program, not with any attempt at economic cooperation but by a mad scramble to buy what raw materials exist in the world in hot competition with each other, which has of course enormously aggravated the inflation. [ER: Yes.] And I think that something on the lines of the Joint Purchasing Board, which worked so well during the war, should be revived and proper allocations made. I don't see any other way through.

[ER:] Well that would be your suggestion then of how international coordination eh could be developed.

[Robert Boothby: Yep.] That would be really the basis of-of going back to um a Joint Purchasing Board and-and uh trying to decide on fair allocation.

[Robert Boothby:] I feel about this really more strongly than anything else. I feel that it-it is implicit in the Atlantic Alliance that we must get a coordination amounting to a kind of organic consultation. That we should be taking counsel together all the time, not only on economic matters, but on political matters too, with the idea of developing a common strategic and political policy for the Atlantic Union as a whole. I'd like to see the kind of relationship reestablished uh between Great Britain and America that existed during the war under the leadership of Mr. Churchill and of your husband.

[ER:] Well uh-uh that's that's perhaps an ideal um to be hoped for, but you always have to remember uh that there was a great deal of personal um uh friendship that existed there that didn't depend entirely on the need for political and economic cooperation. They just had a good time together because they had many interests and tastes that were—they had in common and that helped the fact that when they came to talk about other things, even if they differed they didn't come to blows in other words. But um I do agree with you that if one could um establish uh some kind of-of closer understanding and relationship, um both on a personal and um-um perhaps a more frequent interchange [Robert Boothby: Yes] would be very helpful of course. (21:35)

[Robert Boothby:] Well I entirely agree that personal touch is frightfully important. Of course we were fortunate in the war because not only had we got it at the highest level of war but it did extend a good way down. Sir John Dill for example [ER: Yes.] had a tremendous position in Washington.

[ER:] Oh, tremendous position.

[Robert Boothby:] And I think we've just got to go on [ER: But of course--] sending chaps over to America [ER and Robert Boothby overlap] until we find one we like.

[ER:] Of course you also had the-the you also had the fact that you had a war um which drove us together because um it's always easier when destruction stares you in the face um to-to get together—we even got

together with Russia—and [Robert Boothby: Yes.] and it makes um-uh it-it—when it isn't quite that clear, it requires more on the side of-of real understanding of what the problems of the world are than it does when you have that ex-extra push of actual destruction that looms in front of you. Well now um I wonder if you feel sympathetic to the Labour Government's reticence concerning the Schuman plan?

[Robert Boothby:] No, not at all sympathetic. I'm afraid I think they handled that extremely badly. There was a formal and quite unnecessarily stiff exchange of diplomatic notes between Paris and London when again, the personal touch should have been brought in, and when again I think Mr. Bevin and some of the supply ministers should have gone straight over to Paris and had a talk with Mister Schuman to find out what was really at the back of his mind. I think we should have been in the discussions from the beginning. I think we could have influenced them in any direction that we wanted because Europe at that time was looking for leadership from us and I'd go further than that and say that I'm quite sure that sooner rather than later we shall have to participate in the Schuman Plan because I don't think it will work without us.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think uh that that is uh a very accurate statement and I believe that the French and uh most of the other uh countries of Western Europe agree that it is vital that the British should participate, but I find that we have to stop for just a moment and then we'll continue the program again in just a few minutes.

[Break 23:47-23:53]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now we'll return to our interview that uh Mother is having today with uh Mr. Robert Boothby in the studios of BBC in London.

[ER:] Well Mr. Boothby, as I told you before, has been a conservative member of the House of Commons for twenty six years, and we were talking about the Schuman Plan. And um I was interested in your saying, Mr. Boothby, that uh you felt there should have been closer coordination because when I talked with Mr. Schuman he told me that the door was always open and that he hoped Great Britain would come in. Now I wonder, what will the Schuman Plan mean to the economy of Great Britain?

[Robert Boothby:] Well I'm delighted to hear that Mr. Schuman said that, because I believe it's going to mean a great deal in the long run to our economy. I don't forget the 1930s uh when uh there was an overproduction of steel in Europe, when all our steel workers were, or many of them were being laid off, heavy unemployment, we went through a great crisis, and we solved that problem by joining, rather quietly, an international cartel run by the big steel boys in Luxembourg. That is one solution but it seems to me that the Schuman Plan is a much better solution. Now the trouble, or not the trouble but one of the reasons I think why we're in no hurry about it is that at the moment there is an under-production of steel, tremendous demand and therefore there's no real immediate necessity for it, but it will come.

[ER:] But it will come. [ER laughs] (25:29)

[Robert Boothby:] It will come.

[ER:] We're always driven to things by necessity, not always by forethought. I sometimes wish we could heh think a little more ahead.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] How long do you think that this underproduction of steel uh will go on with the present uh foreseeable future?

[Robert Boothby:] Well of course I think it was beginning to eh flatten out before the rearmament drive. Now with the rearmament I expect it to go on for some time longer, but it will flatten out. What-what-what one mustn't forget is that this country is the greatest producer of steel and the greatest consumer of steel in Europe. What I feel the Europeans think about it all and about the Schuman Plan is that unless we participate pretty closely in the scheme, it's bound in the long run to break down because they couldn't stand up against us if we just decided to have a competitive war against the—even all the industries under the Schuman Plan—that's why I feel it's so important to get some order into it.

[ER:] Of course if we could get some kind of-of uh—one-one can't help wanting to think about peace times and being able to think of what one would need. As I go through Europe it strikes me that the need for housing—and of course steel does go into housing—is so great that there might be a great deal done, and along peacetime lines for long periods to come, if one planned it well.

[Robert Boothby:] Oh I think so and I think the essence of the Schuman plan is that it should be above everything else an expansionist plan, and not a restrictive plan.

[ER:] Not a restrictive plan.

[Robert Boothby:] But I-I feel that perhaps of all the raw materials, steel is the one that's likely to get easier first. Uh there is a tremendous potential production in Europe if you include the raw in this country.

[ER: Yes.] And I think we're likely to overcome that shortage quicker than the other shortages, or many of them. (27:25)

[ER:] Well I would hope uh then that it could go into things that one sees. It seems to me that housing is one of the worst needs in many of the countries that I've happened to just go through, and you can just cast a glance and see that housing is-is-is needed. Now, to leave that for a minute, I wonder how uh you feel about the British foreign policy in other important areas of the world: the Far East for instance which [unclear]. [ER laughs]

[Robert Boothby:] Naturally. Well I uh I-I again think the-the tragedy of that situation is that there hasn't been a far closer coordination of policy between the United States and this country, and indeed all the Atlantic Pact powers. I think we've been far too inclined to paddle our own canoes and just hope for something to turn up, and then when some crisis develops inevitably decisions have to be made. They're made in-in Washington because the United States is the strongest power, then we don't quite agree but we have—feel that we have to go along and that gives rise to subsequent misunderstandings. I'd more like a much closer coordination of policy.

[ER:] Well now-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well according to—excuse me Mother, for interrupting—but uh according to uh the followers of General MacArthur's way of thinking, uh we have been following a British policy in the Far East.

[Robert Boothby:] Well I wish there'd been a British policy to follow. That's all I'm going to say but I [unclear]--

[Everyone laughs]

[ER:] Now that must have been said to me the other day, too! By both Labour and-and um Conservative.

[Robert Boothby:] I've never seen a sign of one yet.

[ER:] Well, do you think the recognition of communist China was a mistake? (29:06)

[Robert Boothby:] Well I didn't take, Mrs. Roosevelt, a firm line one way or the other about that at the time, because I just felt I didn't know enough about it. I haven't ever been to the Far East, and some of our business people with great experience there told us at the time that it would be a good thing, that we would be able to get contacts in Peking with the—with the communist government, and that it might be decisive in taking them away from the domination of the Soviet Union. And I felt that was an argument, at the time, which might be very strong.

[ER:] Now um uh you have, of course, a great many people who have for many years um had, either because they lived there for a while or did service there or were in business there, they'd had contacts in those areas and also in India and um my husband knew some of those people and um I still see them occasionally. And I read in your papers while I'm here some of these things and there seems to be a widespread feeling here that um the Chinese communists, perhaps at the top there might be one or two who had been very close um with Moscow for a while but that largely, the Chinese, while he will be a communist in the sense that he wants uh a different economy and a cleanup in many of the uh things that have gone wrong in China for a long time, the corruption of government and so forth, that he is not the same as a Moscow communist. Now I wonder if that is the way you as a conservative feel?

[Robert Boothby:] Well that I think is how we felt about it when—when we recognized China, and I think it's the reason why we did recognize China. But what rather sticks in my throat now is the idea of being on diplomatic terms with a government of a country which is in fact killing our people in Korea [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] I just don't like that and—

[ER:] Well you see, that is our trouble too. [ER laughs] I mean really—

[Robert Boothby:] Uh I do, I do feel that very strongly I have complete sympathy with that—with that idea and I—I really think that unless we can get some reasonable truce somewhere out of this Korean business, if this war is going to be expanded and develop, I for one would strongly advocate breaking off all diplomatic relations with China, because I think it's impossible to ask people to go and fight and die against a—a government with whom you are in formal contact.

[ER:] Well first great—

[Robert Boothby:] It's as if we were in contact with the German government during the war?

[ER:] A great many of us have felt that as long as China was actually the aggressor, no matter what the reason might be, you couldn't very well recognize the aggressor who is actually fighting your people in Korea. And um that—that I think is the feeling of um people in the United States. It isn't that we don't want the war to come to an end and some kind of-of understanding to be reached, but um simply that you can't recognize a government and have diplomatic relations with them as long as they are actually fighting you.

[Robert Boothby:] Well as a British I can only say that I am in complete sympathy with that feeling.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Would you go so far as to say that you feel that that also is responsible for the uh real breakdown uh of uh support of the government in Iran, where today uh we're faced with the fact that the

most of British and American investments are uh going to be lost and there's a much closer relationship being built up between uh the Iranians and the Soviet Union? (33:04)

[Robert Boothby:] Well I think our policy in the Far East is being perhaps misguided, but I think our policy in the Near East really can hardly be mentioned, it's been so bad. Shocking, everywhere in every direction, bad in Persia, shocking over Palestine, and I think we've—our prestige under this government in the Middle East has been reduced to somewhere around zero. Now on Persia I should say again the only possible way out is Anglo-American cooperation at every level, political and economic.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] I have a feeling from something I heard, in a very uh strange and rather not at all on high level uh ways, that perhaps one of the ways that both Great Britain and the United States fail in those areas of the world, which are underdeveloped areas, is that we do not carry on the kind of propaganda that gets to the people in a very curious way. Um it was brought to my attention that um the um USSR had taken a few people into their country and indoctrinated them thoroughly and sent them back to form little groups of players who would give little plays on village—in the middle of little villages or on street corners and would always end—would tell the people's miseries and always end with the Soviet solution, which would be a good one. Now you know that's the kind of propaganda that we don't do. And I think it's a very clever one.

[Robert Boothby:] And I think it's a pity. And I'm sure it is but I think one of the reasons is that we don't really study the psychology of the people. Now for example I-I will only just say this, this one thing as an illustration of that. The Anglo-Iranian oil company has done a great deal of welfare work for its workers in Persia. There's no doubt they're better off than any other Persians. And they built, I think, twenty-five thousand houses for their workers alone. They don't seem to realize that if they put a couple of Persians on the board of the Anglo-Iranian company, it would have done more psychological good than all the welfare work which all the masses of the Persians don't understand.

[ER:] I hate to bring this to a close cause I feel as though we were just starting [Robert Boothby: Yes.] talking about interesting things but I must. Thank you very much, I must stop this interview.

[Robert Boothby:] Thank you.

[Break 35:28-35:41]

[ER:] From the simple fact of an apple falling from a tree, Sir Isaac Newton hit upon the law of gravity, all-important to the science of physics. Today, science still seeks facts. Medicine, for example, needs facts concerning the number of people in the United States who are afflicted with multiple sclerosis, a paralyzing disease of the central nervous system which cripples the youth of the nation. Perhaps you can supply information which may help bring health and longer life to someone you know. If you are a victim of multiple sclerosis, a friend of a victim, or a doctor treating a case in whom a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis has been made, please mail a postcard to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society: 270 Park Avenue, New York, New York. To prevent duplication, the name of the patient will be required.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] This is Elliott Roosevelt speaking, and reminding you that you have been listening to the Eleanor Roosevelt Program, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time. Today's program was recorded in London, and we wish to thank the BBC for making their facilities available to us.

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