

MRS. ROOSEVELT MEETS THE PUBLIC

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NBC Television Network

Description: In this episode, ER and guests, writer Rebecca West, and Sir Hartley Shawcross, president of the Board of Trade in England, discuss the problems of domestic communism and their shared foreign policy concerns, including the USSR and Germany.

Participants: ER, Rebecca West, Sir Hartley Shawcross

(0:22)

[Theme Music 0:22-0:43]

(0:43)

[Announcer, possibly Ben Grauer:] [music continues] The problem of meeting and combatting communism, both foreign and domestic, is one which confronts all free nations of the world today. What steps must be taken to expose and root out communist organization and operation? How effective will such steps be? To discuss these and equally vital questions, NBC television presents [music ends] *Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public* as kinescoped in the studios of the British Broadcasting Company in London, England. And now to introduce discussion and present her guests, here is Mrs. Roosevelt.

(Break 1:15-1:19)

(1:20)

[ER:] Good afternoon, [ER coughs] the threat of communist world domination is shared by the United States and Great Britain alike. Among the freedom-loving democracies of the world, there are probably no two nations with a stronger bond of friendship firmly rooted in a common tradition. Nevertheless, the approach of our two countries to fundamental, political, and economic problems has often differed sharply in recent years. Then we have some important differences, both in official action and public reaction, in dealing with subversion from within and potential foreign aggression. The British point of view on these matters has been expressed by one of the greatest living masters of our common time. Miss Rebecca West, who has joined us today, is perhaps best known in the United States for her fiction writings. But her political commentaries, in particular her accounts of the treason trials held in London after the war, have penetrated the depths of the British mind.

Our other guest today is a good friend of Miss West's and a particularly good friend of the United States. Sir Hartley Shawcross has recently become a member of the cabinet as president of the Board of Trade. He was previously attorney general, and as such was crown prosecutor in the [Klaus] Fuchs case. He is perhaps best known in our country as the chief prosecutor for the United Kingdom at the Nuremberg trials. But first, I want to ask Miss West: in the light of the Fuchs trial and ensuing cases in the United States, do you believe that we are facing a new kind of subversive activity which is basically different from anything which we have had to deal with before?

[Rebecca West:] Yes, I think it is new because there's never been an imperialist power that's enjoyed the same advantages that Russia does in getting the citizens of other nations to spy for it. Because Soviet Russia can appeal to the social conscience that we've all got today. We all want to abolish poverty; we all want to abolish class distinctions. And Russia pretends to have done this. And therefore it can appeal to Britons, it can appeal to Americans, and say, "If you spy, if you steal atom secrets, if you steal state documents, or if you do sabotage, then you will help us to clamp down on the whole world a system in which there will be no poverty and there will be no class distinctions." Of course, that's all rubbish because actually you in America under capitalism and we in Great Britain under socialism have done more to abolish poverty in the last few years than Russia seems likely to do in a couple of centuries. And also class distinctions and privilege of all sorts are crumbling here. For example, Hartley is a cabinet minister but he doesn't get any advantages except he gets a very natty red dispatch case to carry about with him. But he doesn't really; I think I'm right in saying, get any privileges. Whereas if he was a commissar he'd have the cream of the states. (5:00)

[ER:] [Laughs] What do you think about that, Sir Hartley?

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] [Laughs] That's-that's very, that's great truth in that! A-as for the question, "Is there anything basically new in all of this?" Well of course, in the sense that the ideas which these subversive activities are intended to promote, the ideas are different to any that have been presented to the world before, and perhaps they are more superficially attractive. But there's nothing basically new for us, or I think even for you, in the fact that um subversive activities, whether it's passive subversion by propaganda or active from sabotage, is based now on ideological, rather than on merely mercenary motives. In our um long history, we've had a lot of movements which have been supported by subversion, by attempts to go outside the constitution. There have been republican movements, there have been movements inspired by rival claims to the crown, there have been political and industrial movements like the machine-makers and the Chartists. I think what is new in a sense, about all this, is that this is a movement which intends to introduce not only an ideology which is quite alien to us, but an ideology which is the instrument of a foreign power, so that if we become dominated ourselves by this ideology, we shall in effect become dominated by a foreign power. [ER: I-I--] That's what's basically new.

[ER:] I think that's uh true. That the-the real difference is the fact that it puts you under the domination of a foreign power which um would spread throughout the world [Sir Hartley Shawcross: Yes.] its power. But it's still the power of the foreign uh country. [Sir Hartley Shawcross: Yes.] Well now, I wonder, and I think perhaps I should ask you first, uh Sir Hartley. Is it possible to control this kind of subversion within the framework of a democracy without jeopardizing fundamental civil rights? That's for us one of the greatest difficulties.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] Course, it is the great dilemma of the modern era--the modern age, isn't it? Can you um deal with people who are trying to break the rules without breaking the rules yourself? Can you give the protection of the constitution, and of civil liberties to those who want to destroy the constitution and civil liberties. Of course, [Sir Hartley Shawcross laughs] if you could withdraw civil liberties only from the people who are themselves trying to destroy them, it would be an easy matter, but you can't. And it seems to me, at present at all events, that um it would be unwise to restrict our civil liberties over the whole field of our population in order to meet this menace. I think you can do it by creating an anti-communist atmosphere and by strengthening the resistance to communism without altering your laws.

[ER:] What do you think Miss West?

[Rebecca West:] You know, I wonder if we aren't running ahead of our problems here, because you know really the existing laws ah do cover a great many of conspicuous cases and there's hardly any question of civil rights being involved. Uh Klaus Fuchs and Alger Hiss were civil servants who gave

away the results of their work uh to unauthorized people. Now from the beginning of time, since there ever was a civil servant you could--civil--you uh realize uh that no civil servant could possibly give away the uh inside information he got out of his work to Tom, Dick, and Harry. And it's no use telling me ah that that's a new principle. You could deal with uh Klaus Fuchs and Alger Hiss simply by appealing to the--by taking a stand on the accepted tradition of the civil service. It's not a new situation at all.

[ER:] It has to be treated as it's always been treated [Rebecca West: Yes, as it's always been treated.] Well now, do you believe, uh Sir Hartley, that England's peacetime methods of combating subversion are adequate?

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] I think so. It-it's really a question, I think in the end, whether of--whether you are going to change all your ordinary peacetime methods and go over to the methods of the police state. Ah as Rebecca says, we've got laws about official secrets, we've got a law about treason, we've got a law about sedition, seditious libel, seditious strikes, and so on. And where we can get the people who have committed offenses of this kind, we can deal with them. You could, of course, introduce new laws banning the Communist Party, making it a criminal offense to belong to the Communist Party. I think the only effect of that would be to drive it all underground so that you couldn't estimate the extent and the influence of it, and couldn't get at the really dangerous people. You can't now, of course, but you couldn't even if we altered the law, who are secret communists. And I think that um by altering our laws, but doing ary-away with the right of freedom of speech, freedom from arrest, the right to an open trial by jury. You would not really at any rate at this stage, do any good in destroying these subversive movements that uh exist. I'm sure that you can't go ahead of public opinion, and that the thing to do is to educate public opinion more and more to the dangers of these doctrines. (11:00)

[ER:] Well, what you are really saying is that you uh you think that the basic common law rights of the individual can still be guaranteed. That's what you're really saying.

[Rebecca West:] Well, you know, I'd like to put in a word on this, because I don't think -- I'd like to re-- to support you very strongly in saying that I don't believe it's any good in doing things like outlawing the Communist Party. The open Communist Party consists largely of nitwits who are no good for underground work. They're only allowed to belong to the open Communist Party because they obviously--it wouldn't pay them to withdraw them and put them on to really important work. Uh if you harried these people, you'd just be--you might as well go out to the big gun against rabbits and guinea pigs. They aren't worth it. The really dangerous communists are the people who don't say they're communists, uh who aren't even card carriers, who perhaps literally as I suspect are not members of the Communist Party. But I do feel this: that I think that the Official Secrets Act is rather a stupid act. It doesn't make the person sign a nearly impressive enough undertaking uh not to give away the secrets that he discovers in his work. And I think the penalties ought to be stepped up. I think that you might--that it might be wise to introduce the death penalty. Not that I think it would probably ever be needed, but I do think you have to scare off the silly ass. The [Klaus] Fuchs case was a terrible case, because here was a man who was a soaring genius, but he made a very long statement, and from the statement you could see that when he stopped being a genius he was just a silly ass. He was an adolescent who was stuck at sixteen, [ER laughs] and a very stupid sixteen as well. He was a flibbertigibbet, who had this idea as he'd had a number of other ideas. And I think that you have to deter the flibbertigibbet who's really not got anything very impressive to keep him in control. I think it would be a good thing if you gave him--had to give a much more impressive undertaking and if the penalty was stepped up. (13:24)

[ER:] Well, that's--that's very interesting. That's what some--the same discussion is going on in the United States and I think it's very valuable to find, and--

[Rebecca West:] I hasten to say that I would hate the death penalty and uh to be uh actually have to be imposed, and it's awful these people who are half idiots and half--

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] But of course, the great danger of stepping out the penalty more than the fourteen years [Rebecca West: Yes.] of imprisonment [Rebecca West: Yes.] which can be given now, is that if you to say the penalty for this is death, juries are more frightened to convict, [Rebecca West: Yes.] and you get [Rebecca West: Yes.] more people being acquitted. It's much better to have certainty of conviction [Rebecca West: Yes.] then ten or fourteen years imprisonment [Rebecca West: Yes.], than people getting off [Rebecca West and ER: Yes.] because juries are frightened.

[ER:] Well now, I want to turn to something else for a minute, Sir Hartley. Do you think that the jur--that the occupation policies, which appear to be weakening the German war trials decisions, are justifiable as an attempt to win Germany's active cooperation with the Western powers? I'm moving away from the other subject, [Sir Hartley Shawcross: Yes.] because I want to cover something more.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] Well, I would dispute that of course, and I would say that there are no occupation policies which are intended or calculated to uh weaken the-the Nuremberg decisions. What are they? The Nuremberg decision, for instance, against uh aggressive war. Is it going to be said that our attempts to mobilize um Western Europe and to contemplate some assistance from Germany in um police activity against those who may threaten aggressive war, is something which detracts from the Nuremberg decision? I should have thought not. [Break 15:04-15:06] Then there was the decision that certain Germans who had been party to the commission of the most abominable war crimes. We're not weakening that by contemplating the decent Germans may assist us in the defense of Western civilization against a possible Soviet attack. Course, I know there have been these cases recently where um certain of the minor criminals, not the Nuremberg ones, but the minor ones, have been released. I made a speech about it a little while ago. And Mr. [John] McCloy, your-your high commissioner for your zone in Germany, um um immediately followed it by a statement. I was very glad he did because he reinforced my theme which was that you mustn't release these wretched men, unless there are some particular grounds, some humanitarian grounds, in the case of each one of them who's dealt with, which justify clemency. But um for the rest, I would certainly deny that there is anything in the policy of my government, and I think it's equally true of your government which is intended to undermine in the slightest degree the fundamental principles of the Nuremberg judgement. (16:21)

[ER:] Well, of course, uh in the United States there was great question about the release of -- and um I had the same assurance from Mr. McCloy. [ER laughs] that-that it was done in an effort to-to give the kind of fair trial that we would give ah at home. But whether -- uh I-I would say, that from the whole tenor of his letter, that he was doing his very best not to weaken um any-any policy.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] I think that um that was certainly his intention. Perhaps sometimes there was misunderstanding about it, but I hope nothing will ever be done to secure German cooperation by weakening those positions. After all, we don't need to tout for membership of our Western civilization club. Good candidates will be elected to it, and we're not going to tout for bad ones.

[ER:] [Laughs] That's a good decision. [Track skips 17:19] want to ask you something going a little bit back again to our former ah subject, Miss West. I understand that some of the key positions in your trade unions are held by communists. What safeguards do you and Sir Hartley propose to take against this possible internal weakness while you prepare strong defenses against a possible communist aggressor?

[Rebecca West:] Well, it's very nice of you to ask, it's obviously much more a question for Sir Hartley alone, but uh the--we can all fight against communist domination of trade unions. Because the reason that the communists dominate trade unions is that they work so hard. They have the terrific devotion of

fanatics. [Sir Hartley Shawcross: That's quite right.] You see, there's one thing that lots of people do like conspiring and they like getting in, they like being part of a minority that fools the majority and gets power. And in every trade union you'll hear of the communists turning up and prolonging a meeting ah by uh filibustering until uh every -- the non-communist will appeal, "I'm going home to eat my supper, I can't stand this any longer." [ER laughs] Then you slip forward-then you slip [Sir Hartley Shawcross: Yes.] forward a resolution. Uh the prime way that you can counter ah communist domination of the trade unions is for the non-communists to work harder. And um time, I think, will--every year, every month, makes the situation more obvious. And I think the non-communist uh unionist is feeling the situation much more than he did just as the leaders are.

[ER:] I-I--

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] I-I think that's quite true. Already some of the communist leaders in the trade unions have been thrown out. Others have been elected in their turn. Some unions are considering the idea of banning communists all together from the position of officials in their unions. I'm sure Rebecca is quite right. These communists regard their communism as a kind of perverted religion. We've got to make our people, who believe in freedom and democracy, have the same active interest in it. That's what we're trying to do, and we're moving a long way in that direction.

[ER:] Well, the-the interesting thing to me is that uh the communist tactics never change. They were the same in the youth movements when I was [Sir Hartley Shawcross: Yes.] active in um uh seeing a good deal more than I am today of the young youth groups. The tactics are the same, and as you know, they're the same in the United Nations.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] Exactly the same, yes.

[ER:] So it's-it's very interesting to see how it um it never changes, I wish we could find a way of being sure that we would always uh meet uh in-in the same way, don't you know, because you--the pattern is there.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] The patterns exactly the same, I quite agree.

[ER:] Well now, I would like to ask you, Sir Hartley, to what extent do you agree with claims made here that uncontrolled expenditure and stockpiling of strategic raw-raw materials in the United States threatens Britain's arms program and her general economic stability?

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] Well, I must say that I trust the United States about this matter. You-you very kindly said that I was a friend of the Americans, and I am. I, if I wasn't a Britisher and very proud of being one, I'd like to be an American. And I think the Americans will appreciate the situation. It's inevitable of course, that in view of the present tense international situation, in America, and in other countries, there should be some strategic stockpiling and we've got to recognize that. On the other hand, if that were at the expense of our existing production both of our arms and for maintaining our economies and our viability, we should really defeat our own ends and the uh -- and our own aims in the end. Our country has to depend on uh raw materials imported from abroad. We don't produce them ourselves, except in regard to coal. And we've made our position very clear, that if we can't get adequate raw materials, we can't keep our industries going, we can't build up our armaments, we can't maintain our exports which are essential in order to enable us to pay our way in the world, and we can't maintain our standard of living. We don't want communism to creep in by the backdoor through a lowered standard of living, ah whilst we're trying to uh build up defenses. But I'm quite sure that the international discussions which are taking place now will be successful, and that you and the other countries involved will see that

we must maintain our economies if we're going to fight communism effectively whether by political means now or if need be by defensive means if we're attacked. (22:41)

[ER:] Well, I wonder, uh Sir Hartley, whether it wouldn't be possible to meet some of these difficulties by consultation before the crucial point comes. It seems to me of late, that there is not quite close enough uh constant consultation so that we can on crisis um and have to find a quick answer, where possibly if we met more often and uh planned a little bit more, uh we might--uh we know that raw materials perhaps are in shortage in some cases throughout the world. I mean it may be impossible to have everything [Sir Hartley Shawcross: Certainly.] that everybody wants. Planning seems to me essential.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] I think that's perfectly true. Of course, the Korean uh aggression precipitated these troubles. We have now got as you'll know an international materials conference, sitting in Washington permanently, and we hope that will be able to plan out the allocation of the world's available raw materials amongst the different countries of the world who need them, so as to insure that these crises don't happen in future. One of the reasons for our government changes here, the appointment of my colleague Mr. [Richard] Stokes, for instance, and myself at the Board of Trade, has been to insure that in very close cooperation with yourselves and the other countries in the conference at Washington, we should look ahead and plan ahead, and see that we don't um make any mistakes, so that all countries are able to maintain their economies, build up their defenses, maintain their export trade, ah, ah at the same time. And I think we ought to be successful about that. I'm not joining in any attacks that have been made.

[ER:] Well, that's uh--I'm very glad we're doing that. Now as our time is nearly up, is there any question either of you would like to put to me? Miss West, how about that?

[Rebecca West:] Well, I've often had a thought lately, that I wish you'd do better publicity for America in this country. You know there's a great anti-American campaign [ER: Yes.] in this country.

[ER:] And there's always in our country an anti-British campaign. [ER laughs].

[Rebecca West:] Yes, it's the same kind of people on both sides. A lot of human beings are awfully nasty, aren't they?

[ER:] Yes, they are.

[Rebecca West:] Or awfully nice. But still ah you have a bad publicity here because Americans are thought of as providing Marshall Aid becau-because they're very rich. A sort of rich relatives who are handing out goods. [ER: Yes.] And you know rich relatives aren't always very popular.

[ER:] And if that doesn't mean anything to us.

[Rebecca West:] Well-well, yes. It doesn't really mean anything. I wish there was publicity that would give English people, and French people also-also need to know this, that there are a great many Americans who are individually poor, and that there are a great many social services that you haven't brought up to the level that you would like to bring. I wish that you would lay stress in your publicity more that the Marshall aid is an act of self-sacrifice. It would lead to a very much better international feeling.

[ER:] I am afraid that we have one trouble which perhaps you have too in Great Britain. I'm afraid we boast a little too much, and as a result, the realities are not always understood. For instance, there are many things, now in our social services, that um in Congress they're just saying, "We won't go ahead at

all. We won't do anything." There's a constant fight going on to keep what you have gained in the social services and gradually increase, and um uh the difficulty uh is, I'm afraid, that we don't tell that this is a real sacrifice for the people that the people are actually paying higher taxes, paying higher prices, um that they are really feeling it all the way down the line, not just among the rich. [ER laughs] (27:05)

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] I think that's perfectly right, Mrs. Roosevelt. I--you know, I--our mutual propaganda is bad, we're not really good propagandists and I'm afraid some of our opponents are.

[ER:] No, you're not a--

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] We're not, and you're not, I think, on the whole. What we want to get across I think is that our two countries, and the rest of the Western democracies, are now making tremendous sacrifices in order to preserve our democracy. I'm sure more could be done about it.

[ER:] You um you think that both of us could do better, do you?

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] I think so. We're making great sacrifices. We've got a very short meat ration, heavy taxation, just as you have. Very heavy taxation.

[ER:] You are, and I just wish that we could tell our audience more about the sacrifices both of us are making, but the time has come to an end. And I must thank you, Sir Hartley. Thank you, Miss West and tell you how grateful I am for your being on the program today.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] Thank you very much.

[Rebecca West:] It was lovely to be with you.

[Sir Hartley Shawcross:] Thank you very much. It was very nice to be with you again.

[Theme Music 28:13-28:28]

[Unknown announcer:] [Music continues] Next week, NBC television will again present *Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public* with the discussion of the Schuman Plan. With Mrs. Roosevelt in film interviews especially prepared in Paris, France, will be the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman and the Director General of Plans Jean Monnet. We invite you to join us one week from today for this interesting program. Today's presentation of *Mrs. Roosevelt Meets the Public* was on film kinescoped by the British Broadcasting Company in its London studios.

[Theme music 29:00-29:44]

[Unknown Announcer:] NBC television.

[NBC Chimes]

(29:52)

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