

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

December 21, 1950

Description: In the interview segment, ER discusses topics related to Latin America with author, lecturer, and columnist Edward Tomlinson.

Participants: ER, Edward Tomlinson

[ER:] My guest today is going to tell us a great deal about Latin America, those countries so near to us, and yet about which most of us know very little. He is a pioneer in the Latin American field and has just returned from his fortieth extensive survey. He is a noted author, lecturer and columnist. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Mr. Edward Tomlinson.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Mrs. Roosevelt it's a great privilege indeed, to be on your program.

[ER:] Very kind of you Mr. Tomlinson to come. Now I wonder if you'd tell us, how many years have you been studying our neighbors to the south?

[Edward Tomlinson:] Well you know if I were sensitive about my age, I wouldn't tell you [ER laughs], it's 27 years.

[ER:] That's a long while, really.

[Edward Tomlinson:] It really is.

[ER:] Actually and have you gone every year, practically?

[Edward Tomlinson:] Sometimes two and three times. Of course not to all the countries each time, but to the important ones. (1:05)

[ER:] And on each trip have you stayed a certain length of time in certain countries?

[Edward Tomlinson:] Oh yes, sometimes I spend as much as five or six months in Latin America at one time.

[ER:] That really means uh-uh real study. Well now um, I'd like to ask you whether you think uh enough people here at home in the United States know as much as they should know about their neighbors in Central and South America? And do you think that the press covers that area sufficiently well for our information?

[Edward Tomlinson:] I really think this is one the saddest things that I know. Uh here immediately at our own door are twenty separate, distinct, independent nations, with a population of a hundred and fifty million people, who are our neighbors, our closest neighbors and who mean so much to us, and yet it is seldom that you see any mention made of one these countries on the front page of a newspaper in the United States. We know all about Iran, we know about ah Luxembourg, by the way. We know many things about the smallest countries in Asia and in Europe, and yet Brazil, a vast nation that's larger than the entire United States and another Texas added, with fifty million population, we know practically nothing about it. And I think that that's largely due to the neglect of the press, ah but also to the fact that

we have always gone to Europe. We've traveled to Europe and it's interesting to know that uh, they have done the same thing [ER: Yes.] until the beginning of [ER: Just recently--] just recently.

[ER:] Yes I remember that very well because I went to school in England, there were several South Americans in school in England, and they were the first South Americans I had ever know.[Edward Tomlinson: Yes indeed.] And I was fifteen years old, [both laugh] I'd never know them before.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Well it's ah interesting that the largest steamers crossing the Atlantic, until very recent years really went from Europe to South America and not from Europe to the United States.

[ER:] That's perfectly true, and--(3:23)

[Edward Tomlinson:] Twenty years ago the largest steamers supplying the Atlantic were really going to South America. Principally Germans by the way.

[ER:] Yes of course, they went in great--and of course they did real colonization in South America ah,

[Edward Tomlinson: They--] didn't they really send a good many Germans to really settle there?

[Edward Tomlinson:] The--one of the oldest colonies in all of South America is the German colony in southern Chile [ER: Yes.] and they--and the second one I think is the German colony in southern Brazil. They went to those countries at the same time the Germans came to Wisconsin and that part of the United States.

[ER:] Well I was very much interested in-in the ah winter of forty-four, my husband asked me to go down and visit our soldiers that were in the Caribbean area and also in the northern part of Brazil and--and even um out Galapagos and um he--that gave me chance to meet--because they came up from Rio, though I didn't go to Rio, several of the um wives of officials um came up and met me and one young and charming woman who was evidently very um active in-in various charities as well as civic things um took up with me the problem of the Germans. Because she said so many of them had married Germans and now they had to explain to their children that the Germans overseas were their enemies. [Edward Tomlinson: Exactly.] But the Germans here at home were their friends and they were their uncles and their fathers [Edward Tomlinson: Indeed so.] and their--and that it had really been a problem and I--it was the first time I really realized how, how difficult a problem that was.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Ah it's so interesting that the Germans in Brazil and the Germans in Chile did not take up uh-uh the idea of Nazism so easily. Very few of them. But the newest ones who had come to Argentina and had come over in the past 15 year were out and out Nazis, and of course that accounts for the fact largely that Argentina did not ah go along with the other countries in the war. (5:36)

[ER:] Well of course that's easily understood, isn't it?

[Edward Tomlinson:] Easily--Indeed it is.

[ER:] Its quite easy to-to see that. Well now I-I would just like to ask you something: tie up those years with today a little because today it's not um a Nazi problem it's our--though I still think it exists to a certain extent--uh but the foremost international problem at the moment is the resistance of free people to communist aggression, and so I'd like to ask you about communist activities in the other American republics. Do you think that it's making real headway in those neighboring nations?

[Edward Tomlinson:] That is uh I think the outstanding question of the moment in Latin America. On my trip uh, this last trip, I visited practically all the important countries from Mexico to Argentina. I had

visited all those same countries in the same way just a year ago. And at that time communism was ah rampant in a number of the countries and before that, two or three years before that, the Communist Party in Brazil was the largest communist party outside of Europe or Asia. In one election they voted eh eight hundred-thousand strong. That's really the largest.

[ER:] Well, now-now let me ask you something: is that to be accounted for by the fact that the--there are, in nearly all those countries, some very rich people but a good many very poor people? (7:11)

[Edward Tomlinson:] That is one of the reasons that it took on, but the interesting and most significant thing is that of all parts of the world that is the one p-place where they have actually broken the back of organized communism in all but one or two of the small countries.

[ER:] Well now how have they done that?

[Edward Tomlinson:] They've done it in various ways, of course the courage of the leaders I think is one important thing to keep in mind. Ah--in Brazil and in Chile--the leaders of those two countries, in face of these tremendous organizations simply ah went to work to outlaw the communist parties and organizations and weed them out of the labor unions. That was one of the most difficult things of course, because naturally they would try to control the labor unions [ER: Oh naturally--that's] and particularly the labor unions uh that work for great uh organizations: mining companies and oil companies, particularly those owned by United States capital [ER: Naturally--] and ah they succeed in getting them out of leadership of practically all of the unions. In Mexico I think is a fine example. Take Vincente Lombardo Toledano. He--we know him as one of the outstanding pro-communists in Latin America today. A few years ago he was a president maker, he was the most important single figure in Mexico, he organized the great confederation of labor and ah succeeded in nominating several men for president who became the chief executives, and yet today Toledano is not in his own labor union. They voted him out [ER: [unclear word]]and he is no longer respected in the leading labor circles and he no longer has any particular political influence. (9:02)

[ER:] Now how did they persuade the labor people to do that? Because it must have been persuasion.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Well of course there are several, several things that entered in to it, and I think the communists themselves are partly responsible for their own downfall-- and I'd like to point this out because I think it would be a good suggestion for the Voice of America. The Latin people are not a cruel people.

[ER:] No.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Many people think they are because of the bull fights and that sort of thing. But the Spanish and Portuguese peoples are the most devoted family people in the world. They love children, they love the home life, they're not a cruel people, and the thing that revolted them must have been the cruelty and the bestiality of the communists. Now Bogotá-- the great revolt that took place there in 1948 I think was one of the finest lessons to Latin America that could possibly have been given them. They saw--the leading statesmen from every country-- saw what the communist can do when ah difficulty arises.

[ER:] Yes they were all there at the time.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Absolutely there.

[ER:] I remember that very well because our people--I know some of the people on our delegation were there.

[Edward Tomlinson:] I was there too [ER: you were there too.] in the midst of it, for 24 hours under siege in the building unable to get out [ER: Mhm.] and I saw that. And I saw the reactions of the Latins to this. And then they're a Catholic people, and the way the church has been treated in Europe has had a great influence. And the martyrdom of uh Cardinal Mindszenty particularly, that has been one of the great impressive things on all the peoples of that part of the world. But probably more than anything else, the imposition of the communists on small and weak nations. [ER:[unclear word]] They used to think that we, you see, were the great uh [ER: imperialists] invaders and imperialists. Now they understand who is really the imperialist.

[ER:] That's most interesting.

(Break 11:02 -11:18)

[ER:] Mr. Tomlinson, we were talking about something which interests me a great deal, and I'd like to ask you: what was the communist strategy in these South American countries? Did they intend to take over governments or to use them to create pressure against the United States?

[Edward Tomlinson:] Well of course, first of all if they could have taken over governments they would. And in one or two instances they almost succeeded. Particularly in Chile in 1946, they were the balance of power in the presidential election. Ah but first of all they wanted to be in position to influence public opinion. Influence public opinion particularly in the United States, or against the United States. If they could tie us up, if they could divert us, if they could cause chaos in various countries there, why then we wouldn't be in such a position to resist their aggressions in other parts of the world. And uh I think more important than that uh they realized the tremendous importance of the natural resources of Latin America to the United States in a great crisis. There's tin, there's uh copper, there's uh sugar and innumerable other things.

[ER:] Oh and of course there is vast undeveloped country there which can mean--we don't know yet what is in many of those countries.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Indeed.

[ER:] I know flying over Brazil and seeing that silly little railroad that runs from Recife to uh somewhere nearby and takes about two days to do what we did in two hours by air. Burning wood. I couldn't help thinking what there was, it was really as you looked at the area, you felt why this could be as exciting pioneering as anything in the world and it's the development of the United States all over again.

[Edward Tomlinson:] And that is exactly what's taking place in Brazil. I was very much interested this time, ah visiting old friends in the cities of Rio and Sao Paulo, you would go to dinner in the evening and somebody would make a remark, "Well Carlos has just left, he's gone to his new fazenda in Mate Grosso way over in the wild interior of the Brazil." Mate Grosso is becoming a great cattle country now, becoming the Texas of Brazil [ER: Texas] and it's going to rival Argentina. The pampas of um Mate Grosso are even more beautiful than those of Argentina. And in other sections they're raising various kinds of grains and so on. Uh, Brazil is becoming a wheat country now and families are going all the way up in to the interior of Goias, that's almost in the center of that vast nation of Brazil, and young people are going up there and homesteading and uh building uh homes and living there and growing new crops and so on. (14:18)

[ER:] That's just the feel I got of it when I was there--and most exciting, really very exciting.

[Edward Tomlinson:] I heard a number of people say, "Our young men are going west," [ER: well there you are.] they use that expression all the time.

[ER:] It's the same thing. Well now to what extent do you think the inter-American policy of our state department contributed to the resistance of various governments to communist infiltration?

[Edward Tomlinson:] Do you know, it's a very sad thing Mrs. Roosevelt, but I can't give as much credit for their resistance to communism. Uh, they have done it without a Marshall Plan, without an arms program. They have done it themselves. It's one anti-communist program, anti-communist campaign, that has been carried through without vast sums of money from the United States.

[ER:] Probably primarily because of the influence of the church.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Not necessarily the influence of the church, that is one of the influences, but the Latin temperament, he resists being regimented, he resists the attempt to control his personal life. They've had their dictators, yes. But dictators usually have to do only with political affairs. They never touch the home life of the people, they never touch to the private business of the people. And if--only a few instances-- that's the thing that caused them to resist communism more than anything else.

[ER:] Now, that's-that's an interesting trait. Now do you consider that at present we have a sound foreign policy then in Latin America? Or do you feel that we still are failing?

[Edward Tomlinson:] I think [ER coughs] it is very difficult to tell whether we have any policy at all toward Latin America at the moment. I would like to say this, and I'm sure you'll be interested to hear what I have to say about this, that since your husband was president and the great Cordell Hull was Secretary of State and they carried through this wonderful Good Neighbor policy so successfully, I don't think we've had a steady policy toward Latin America since then.

[ER:] Well that's what they say, you know. They tell me that, quite frankly in the United Nations, they say we've treated them like step-children.

[Edward Tomlinson:] That's exactly the word.

[ER:] We've thought all of Europe and none--nothing of them.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Exactly that is true. Ah for the first time in history the Good Neighbor policy put those countries on equal terms with all other countries in the world and now we have slipped back again to this attitude. It's an unfortunate thing, that, "Well the European countries, and so on, those are the great and cultured countries, these are just undeveloped areas down to the south of us."

[ER:] Well I don't think it's entirely that. I really think that we have concentrated on-on Europe largely because it was the closest barrier uh visible to us at one time between communism and ourselves probably. But um--

[Edward Tomlinson:] the effects are just the same.

[ER:] the effects are just the same.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Well that's-that's the point. And then remember that uh we have poured out billions and billions in Europe and Asia uh to help brace them against communism. Uh, suppose communism had succeed in getting a hold of a hundred and fifty million people at our own door what would have happened? And they realize that they have done this and they have asked us for help. They have talked

about assistance to develop their great natural resources, things that mean something to us, uh but we haven't done it.

[ER:] I don't quite understand why the um--of course it's not--what I'm saying is not true for instance of Nelson Rockefeller and I suppose there are other people that I don't know about. But I've never quite understood why it didn't seem to catch our imagination to um uh do things in South America the way it did in other parts of the world. (18:21)

[Edward Tomlinson:] It's been a very unfortunate thing ever since the war that we have neglected that part of the world. Eh, you see we told these people that we would never neglect them again, we did that after the first World War, they went in wholeheartedly with us. Brazil lost its enter merchant marine uh because of German submarines. Its own people went across and fought; it sacrificed. I was in cities in Brazil during the war when thousands and thousands of people went hungry every day because there was no transportation to get food back and forth to the great cities. They went through all of that. We said we'll stand by you after the war. Immediately after it was all over we stopped doing anything for them. [ER: Hmm.] It's a sad thing.

[ER:] [ER coughs] Well it's a sad thing because it's not really keeping our word and that um is a bad thing for a great nation, particularly a nation that now is forced to take leadership, because they don't believe you if you haven't kept your word in the past.

[Edward Tomlinson:] I'm wondering if they don't uh-uh begin to question some of our uh-uh requests in the United Nations at the moment.

[ER:] I'm quite sure they do, one-one-a thing that has interested me very much is when Mr. Noriega [Raul Noriega (Ondovilla)--d. 1975] of Mexico just calmly said to me, "Well the real reason you want a federal-state clause is just so that you can um-- what you're doing is make a reservation so that you can do in Texas what you want with Mexican labor." Well um of course, that isn't quite truthful but I quite understood why he felt that way.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Exactly. If I were a Mexican I'd feel exactly that way. [ER and Edward Tomlinson laugh]

[ER:] So there you are. Now there's one other thing that interests me: not a great deal is written or published here in the United States, except about um the things that go wrong [Edward Tomlinson: Exactly] next door. If um there is a revolution then it's spread all over our front pages, but nothing constructive. For instance when you told me that Brazil was actually beginning to develop its um western section, that's the first time I had ever heard anything about it and I've thought about it a lot ever since I flew over Brazil.

[Edward Tomlinson:] There-there are towns now in the far interior of uh Brazil of fifty and sixty thousand people that were mere villages only five or six years ago apparently. (20:56)

[ER:] Now of course there's-there is great poverty and-and lack of certain educational advantages, um is--do you think that's improving?

[Edward Tomlinson:] I think it's improving a very great deal. In a recent lecture at the Town Hall in New York City uh I talked about what had been done in the past few years in the matter of education, in the matter of labor laws, in the protection of workers. Did you know, that some of those countries have the most advanced social laws in all of the world?

[ER:] Well I know Uruguay is—

[Edward Tomlinson:] Chile, Venezuela now does too, several of the other countries. And women are taking such a great part in these things too. Uh --

[ER:] That's interesting.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Women vote now in half the countries in Latin America and hold office.

[ER:] Well now, what do you think, because we think primarily of their countries as having revolutions and dictators-- politically, we feel there is an instability. What do you think about that?

[Edward Tomlinson:] I think that they're improving politically all the time. Let's take briefly twenty countries in any other area of the world and see how they compare with these countries to the south of us in political stability, or in uh-uh-uh improvement in political institutions. I think you would find that the twenty Latin American countries uh hold just about as good a record as any other twenty in any other area of the world.

[ER:] Oh you've done wonders for me, because I've always had a great affection for all that area of the world.

[Edward Tomlinson:] Thank you.

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File(s): 72-30(52)

Transcription: Daniella Amell

First edit: Isabel Maier

Final edit: Christy Regenhardt

Final check by Natalie Hall