Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the United Nation's position on human rights and how the organization defines human rights. In the interview segment, ER's guest is Lancing B. Shield, president of the Grand Union Company.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Lansing P. Shield

[ER:] Good Afternoon, this is Eleanor Roosevelt. I am happy to welcome you for another visit here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel. As usual, I have a guest that you will be anxious to meet, and, as usual, Elliott will assist me on the program. And now here is Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. Today's guest is Mr. Lansing P. Shield, Mr. Shield is president of the Grand Union Company, one of America's leading chain store operations. The Grand Union Company has pioneered in the establishment of a unique relationship between management and its workers, whereby each worker can benefit in proportion to his contribution through a profit-sharing plan. As our broadcasts continue, an increasing amount of mail is reaching us. A good part of this mail is concerned with the request for further enlightenment in both national and international matters. Mother will discuss one of these queries today. First, however, a word from our sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

(Break 1:18-1:42)

[Elliott Roosevelt]: [Clears throat] And now, Mother, to our letter for today. It's from Mr. William J. Crole Jr. of Wyncote or Whinecoat [Wyncote is the correct spelling]. I don't know how you pronounce that uh Pennsylvania. It's a very long letter so I'll just quote parts of it. Mr. Crole writes: "As to what degree the UN ought to undertake the definition of human rights, which is the subject of your radio program December the 29 with your guest Roger Baldwin. Let us assume that a main UN objective should be promoting the dignity and wholeness of all humanity, while promoting the dignity, the best freedom and wholeness of average people, of the average world citizen. With this yardstick, ought the UN concern itself at all with the definition of human rights? Perhaps the answer should be decidedly no. With this yardstick, ought not a very particular concern of the UN be fundamental duties and loyalties of world citizenship? Insofar as these be essential to wholeness of individual citizens and to wholeness of the world, perhaps the answer should be emphatically: yes, it ought! Perhaps our great need is for a UN commission of world citizenship broadly in charge of world citizenship duties and loyalties, an ex-officio disqualified from interfering anywhere with an existing order beyond its duties with respect to maintain rules for living wholeness. A neighbor thinks this ought to be under wide discussion." I think uh the question's uh little uh confusing but I think maybe you can--

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] I find- I find that term, living wholeness uh[Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] uh uh rather[Elliott Roosevelt: Difficult of definition.] Difficult of definition. Now as to the very simple thing of uh whether people should consider uh their uh-- the obligations which naturally go with any rights or freedoms for any individual um that, of course, we not only considered very carefully but uh was uh rather carefully worded in-in one of the articles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Uh we devoted one article to saying that it was impossible for people to have human rights or freedoms without uh obligations and
um uh responsibility[Elliot Roosevelt: Mhm.] going with uh those rights and freedoms. And that, therefore, while we thought it inadvisable in this declaration to put down with each right the uh uh the particular responsibility [Elliot Roosevelt: Yeah] that went with it uh because we thought it took away in a document from the impact of stating the rights, um still we did not in any way minimize the obligation that was there and the necessity for people to think about those obligations.

[Elliot Roosevelt:] Mhm. But I think that uh what this gentlemen is primarily concerned with, and I-I detect through the language that he has used what his real focus is. I believe that he is trying to state that the UN should be concerning itself more, perhaps, with promoting the idea of world citizenship uh versus, uh the-the question of whether human rights have been transgressed in certain areas and whether human freedoms exist in those areas.

[ER:] Well, um I-I don't quite understand in the way in which he has used world citizenship um everybody is a citizen of the world as a whole as well as a citizen [Elliot Roosevelt coughs] of their own particular uh country. And because you love your own country it doesn't take away from your obligation as a citizen of that country to be also a citizen of the larger uh area of the world. Now in your own country you have certain duties and obligations to preserve human rights and freedoms and as you move out into the responsibilities that go with your world citizenship, you're certainly going to find that you have certain obligations and responsibilities to see to it that those human rights and freedom are observed, perhaps in different ways in different parts of the world. But um according to uh their customs and habits one should um attempt to give the same uh uh conception of the sacredness of the human personality eh and uh the rights of those people as one has anywhere in the world.

(7:28)

[Elliot Roosevelt:] Mhm. Well you know, uh perhaps what uh ah Mr. Crole is uh really driving at is that he believes that the uh the best way to achieve uh-uh freedom for the individual is for us to expose through the UN Human Rights Commission, in any part of the world wherever it might exist, through the constant education of people in the free parts of the world, the-the conditions that exist in- in those other parts and their responsibility they-they the free people, who do not live under that yoke, what the conditions are that exist there and how they must help to combat those conditions.

[ER:] Well, but most of those conditions in many countries um arise from, poverty and uh a lack of education among the people. [Elliot Roosevelt: Mhm.] Uh first a lack of food and then a lack of education Um because when you lack food, you also uh- uh, usually lack um [Elliot Roosevelt: Health.] health. And um uh when you lack health uh you lack the ability to take an interest in um getting an education and taking a part in what is going on in the world around you. Now um it may well be that um what he has in mind is that we should attempt to know where this happens throughout the world, and uh that when we can find out we should immediately do something to change it. Now we have uh heard, of course, of-- that even in the um Soviet Union human rights and freedoms are not as carefully observed as we uh think--

[Elliot Roosevelt:] Even?! That is putting it very mildly [Elliot Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Well, but we haven't been able to find out very much about it before [Elliot Roosevelt coughs] and uh now we are beginning to get some rather more authentic information and we do find that there are things that um uh almost one can prove today which before it was extremely difficult to get any proof on. Now, if that is the case, uh perhaps what he has in mind is that we should um keep bringing these um backward peoples face to face with the enormity of their own uh lack of world citizenship.

(10:24)
Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm. Well, I think that maybe we could uh uh also say that uh uh we have to keep promoting to uh the free people what their responsibilities are to these other people who are under the yoke of a lack of freedom.

ER: Well, that may be true.

Elliott Roosevelt: A lack of human rights.

ER: Well, that may be true. But I don't somehow feel that that was on his mind. Elliott Roosevelt: Well very-- He wants to leave out the words "human rights."

Elliott Roosevelt: Well, very frankly, his first uh statement is that the-- with this uh-uh objective on the part of the UN uh toward the uh necessity of promoting the dignity of the average world citizen, which he underlines, he says, "With this ya-yardstick ought the UN concern itself at all with the definition of human rights? Perhaps the answer should be decidedly no." And he's underlined no. And I would uh gather that he feels that uh human rights are of less importance, and he is one of those people who advocates that uh we promote a world citizenship that would uh do away with the barriers of nationalism and so forth and everybody would be in one great big happy melting pot and we'd all have uh no uh barriers uh between us of any kind. I uh I think you might comment just a little bit on how you feel because of -- you've said several times how you feel about the world federalist uh movement which has got the same goal.

ER: Well, I-I don't myself feel that we are yet prepared uh for that uh program because uh we know that to um live together under law and to feel that you are willing to accept uh even certain jurisdiction from a central world government would mean a considerable um understanding among the people involved and I don't think we've reached that point just yet.

Elliott Roosevelt: No, and I think it's rather unrealistic after seeing how the various nations from the smallest to largest uh react whenever you start to move too much toward the removal of their own national freedom uh the violence with which they oppose any such move.

ER: Yes, that's quite true. That's--

Elliott Roosevelt: Well, in other words uh you're feeling is that the answer to Mr. William J. Crole of uh Whinecoat or Wyncote [correct spelling in Wyncote], Pennsylvania is that you feel uh definitely that the UN should con-uh-concern itself with the definition of the term human rights.

ER: I'm afraid they have to because those are the terms written into the charter.

Elliott Roosevelt: Right. And that world citizenship is not uh able to be achieved overnight.

ER: No. That's right. [ER laughs]

Elliott Roosevelt: All right, I guess that's the answer that we have for Mr. Crole, we appreciate his writing in. I'm sorry that we can't discuss this subject further but we better move on to another part of the program, so I turn the microphone over to our announcer.

(Break 13:58-14:09)
[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today is one of outstanding business accomplishment, the creator of a highly successful management labor relationship. His firm belief is that the future of America depends upon the abandonment of the status quo. And upon the acceptance of the philosophy that American business is dynamic, that American business must be adjusted to the changing needs and desires of the American people. He is Mr. Lansing P. Shield, the president of the Grand Union Company. Mr. Shield uh will now start his interview with Mother.

[ER:] I'm so glad to welcome you here, Mr. Shield. [ER laughs] And now I'm-- understand that you people at Grand Union are selling nearly twice the quantity of meat and groceries in your supermarkets today that you sold four years ago. You must have developed some really aggressive selling techniques to make a record like this.

[Lansing Shield:] A lot of factors have gone into this record, Mrs. Roosevelt, plus we can't ignore the increased purchasing power of the public. My own definition of uh really aggressive selling techniques might not be a conventional one. Sound-selling techniques might be described as serving our customers with dependable foods and uniformly low prices week after week and making our stores pleasant places in which to shop and in which to work. All this means that Grand Union must have employees who are thoroughly interested in serving the customers well. Now to accomplish this, our employees must feel that they are important participants in Grand Union, that they are truly partners with management and that the company's success is their success.

[ER:] That's um a very interesting philosophy, and it was the general theme of your address on initiative incorporated at the Harvard Business School uh last summer at their conference. And um also of your talk at the Herald Tribune Forum, wasn't it?

[Lansing Shield:] That's right.

[ER:] Well, your idea of making every man um sort of have an enterprise of his own, uh in a business [ER laughs] is-- um in this day of assembly line since standardization, is a bit difficult, I should think, of accomplishment. So how do you carry it out in a practical manner?

[Lansing Shield:] The very fact that our economy is becoming so standardized is a good reason for us businessmen to try to minimize its effects. It is not so difficult as it may first uh seem. In the first place we must create a proper climate for our employees. And this means doing all those things which we hear so much about today in the way of liberal employee policies. Such as uh a plan to take care of them in their old age and adequate sick pay so they won't worry if they lose time on the job and holidays and vacations so that they may uh keep healthy, you might say, and get some recreation in addition to their jobs. All these things help make a proper climate, I would say.

[ER:] It always interest me to hear you uh describe a proper climate because I have to argue so much in the United Nations over what economic and social rights really are in the human rights um bills. And the Soviets always tell me that they are the only ones who can really provide economic and social rights because there the government sees to it that every man has a job. [ER clears throat] And I always have to come back with the fact that perhaps it isn't always the job the man wants [ER laughs].[Lansing Shield: That's very true.] So I'm always interested to hear you [ER laughs] describe what you think the proper climate is. But even if you pay your Grand Union people well, as I know you do, and provide them with all these benefits, this still doesn't necessarily make them partners in the business. This ideas uh-- idea of yours must go much further than this, doesn't it?

(18:55)
[Lansing Shield:] There are several steps involved. After creating the proper climate uh it's necessary to give the employees the proper understanding of the business and to educate them in their jobs. In order to accomplish this we have a rather large school up here in Pleasantville [NY], where we train employees at all level in their jobs, and then we have an extensive on-the-job training program, we have a monthly magazine, and then we uh run some unusual projects. The most recent of them was "Clerksday" at Grand Union.

[ER:] (ER laughs) Well, what's that?

[Lansing Shield:] Uh well, on that day um a young fellow from upstate Vestal, New York, took my place as president for the day. And every other executive position and uh every uh position of every store manager was covered uh for one day by a clerk. This clerk sat at my desk and uh probably did a better job than I could. As a matter of fact, the photographer who took his picture said he was an improvement.[ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh]

[ER:] Well, what I wonder about uh things like that is, do they really get any idea of the problems by doing one day like that?

[Lansing Shield:] Uh they- they get a sense of what it's all about, and they are very much impressed with how complicated the job is. They usually say they had no idea and it really creates a great deal of interest and we've had uh literally scores of requests uh come across my desk for a clerk's day next year.

[ER and Lansing Shield overlap]

[ER:] Well, that's interesting uh because, uh, that shows you really uh did something, that taught your people something and captured their imagination. And that, of course, is what you're trying to do.

[Lansing Shield: That's, uh, really the way to describe it, I would say.

[ER:] And, of course, uh I think it always interests people more when um they-they get a feeling that the daily job they do is tied to something bigger.[Lansing Shield: That's right.]Uh that at once, makes it seem more important, don't you think so?

[Lansing Shield:] Too many of these clerks, are-- -- uh think it's a dead end street. And if we can eliminate that it will help a great deal.

[ER:] Well, that's exactly what I would think. Now; as I follow you, your first- your first try to make your people happy by treating them well. And second, you do everything you can to help them understand the business. But there must be other steps too in your rather unique program of employee partnership. What do you do?

[Shield:] Well, th-there are several steps. I might uh comment a word on y-your last uh statement. Uh when we were talking about clerks not uh realizing that there was uh any opportunity. Last year over twelve hundred uh employees in our business were promoted out of some sixty-five hundred employees, which is a fairly high ratio. [ER: Mhm.][Lansing Shield:] So there is an opportunity.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] What is the turnover, Mr. Shield, of employees uh say at the clerk's level? Do you manage to hold them at a -- on a pretty steady basis?

[Lansing Shield:] Each year our turnover drops sharply. One of the easy tests of that, each year our vacation payroll mounts very sharply which indicates that turnover is lower.
[ER and Lansing Shield]

[ER:] Oh of course, because as you go on, stay longer, you get a longer vacation.

[Lansing Shield:] Yes, yes, that's right. We lose very few uh people uh practically no uh people to uh competitors. In uh this period we'll begin to lose some people to defense industries. You could understand that.

(22:41)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh, yes.

[ER:] M-hm. Oh yes, you have to do that.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] To the draft, unfortunately [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[Lansing Shield:] Oh, we- we- we've got plenty of them in the army, and I regret to say we have some casualties already in Korea.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, that must raise quite a difficult problem in recruiting new uh labor for your organization because you must have to pick rather carefully.

[Lansing Shield:] Yes uh but it's surprising how many people seem to want to work in the food chain business. We ran an ad last week for employees in Patterson, New Jersey, and we had 198 good applicants answer the ad, which I thought was rather remarkable.

[ER:] Do-do you have to take more women?

[Lansing Shield:] Oh yes, the-the proportion of women will steadily go up.

[ER:] Will steadily go up. That's what[Lansing Shield: Yes.] always happens, of course.[Lansing Shield: Yes.]I'd, uh, I'd like to ask you one thing, and that is, in this type of business, of course um there is an enormous amount, I think, to make it interesting in that it ties in both with the actual production of food in one's own country and with what has to be obtained from other countries. Which, of course, the minute you have difficulties throughout the world uh brings you into the whole international situation. [Lansing Shield: Mhm. True.] Do you make any effort to bring to your people um a picture of how their business ties in with all these different world situations and national situations?

[Lansing Shield:] I wouldn't say that we do it in-- on any uh consistent scale. Uh we do supply them with magazines and pamphlets which uh- uh tell them about the source of the foods that they sell in their stores so that they will get uh more interested in what they're trying to do.

[ER:] Well that's--that's uh a great deal just--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, could I interrupt here for just a moment as I think that our announcer would like to have a word? And then we'll come right back to the interview.

[ER:] [laughs] All right.

(Break 24:44-24:53)
[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now, Mother, I think we can return to our interview with uh Mr. Shield, and uh the story of his success with the Grand Union Company, which is probably as good a uh demonstration of how the American way can operate and how American business can operate in competition with the so-called "government restrictions" of uh governments like the Soviet Union.

[ER:] Well I uh missed asking you something that I wanted to ask you, Mr. Shields, and that is um what about your profit sharing plan?

[Lansing Shield:] We believe that's an important step in making uh employees feel that they're part of management. And all of our store managers and our meat department managers and most of our produce department managers share directly in the profits of their stores. And all our department heads and junior executives and other executives also share in proportion to the profits. Uh several years ago, we took eight stores that were losing a great deal of money and it looked like we'd have to close them. I called the managers one day and told them they could uh have half of any profits they could make, explaining very clearly that it was going to be a difficult job to make any. And believe it or not within six months all eight stores were in the black. [ER: Why that][Elliott Roosevelt: Mm.]Which I thought was really quite significant.

[ER:] Well, that must have really meant uh an initiative on their part um both of saving, where there were chances to save, and um uh really trying to please the public.[Lansing Shield:] Serve the customer better, yes. That's the answer.

[ER:] That's very interesting. Well, it sounds fair enough to uh for um people to share in the success of their own company, so now we'll go back again and say that you've created a favorable climate in your company for individual initiative, you've given your people a broad understanding of your business and your problems, and you spread the profits among those who bring in the profits. Now, just how do your people actually contribute to this partnership that you've established? How do they exercise their individual initiative?[Elliott Roosevelt coughs]

[Lansing Shield:] We have many ways of uh uh trying to accomplish this, uh probably the most interesting one is the creation of management boards throughout the company. In all our divisions and in our warehouses and shops we have boards uh which uh are comprised of employees appointed by themselves. They meet regularly once a month-- they're rotating boards --and they discuss frankly every policy that they want to and criticize us in any way they want to. In addition to these division and district boards, we have one general board that comes into New York once a month eh composed of managers and department managers from our stores. This board meets in our director's room, we pay them director's fees, they take apart the uh actions of the president and of everyone else and in writing submit definite recommendations. We then have a meeting of our top executive staff and consider each recommendation. We either adopt it or we give them an answer in writing why it isn't practicable. And many of our best ideas come from these boards. I might even say that some of the clerks who've only been with us a few months have come up with some splendid ideas, which prove that-that all the brains are not at the top. Probably the minority at the--are at the top, I might say.

[ER:] Well, that's very, that's very interesting, and um I think it's very natural because, uh, the people who actually do the job-- I remember well in the war going through a big factory in England--and having um where they were showing me about their production uh for war purposes, and having them tell me that they had a suggestion box and that the men who actually did the job were the men who gave the best suggestions for improvement uh in any way, which is your own experience, isn't it?
Yes. We get literally several hundred suggestions a year. And we pay, voluntarily, for any suggestion that we adopt. I personally get, I would say, between three and four hundred suggestions a year addressed to me directly from employees in the stores.

That's very interesting. Every one of those is answered.

That's very interesting. Well, this has been very enlightening to me and I'm sure our audience has been interested, and I can readily understand how you're Grand Union people are really pulling together to put their own company at the top. Almost anything can be accomplished with the proper incentives and with everyone being given the chance to exercise their own initiative; don't you think that's true?

It certainly is, and I'm always impressed with the fact that the -- we've accomplished what we have in this country by exercising the initiative of the minority. And if we could get the majority to exercise their initiative, there'd be no limit to the productivity of our country.

That's an idea that I think might have a little thinking over by a good many people. The trouble is, I think, a great many people are diffident, about whether their initiative would be acceptable. I think that's what holds a lot of people back.

That's true. They're afraid of the top brass.

Yes. They're -- I think that happens.

Well and also, I think that we've found from the letters that we get from listeners that they feel that they're own individual efforts are not going to be too important and they have no way of getting them listened to. And so they become discouraged and they just become discouraged with the whole system. Uh I know that we get a great many letters from people on the subject of how terrible our government is and how badly it's being run and mother keeps them telling them that it all depends on you.

On your own personal interest in the government, if it's gonna work.

That's right. One of the things I would say is bravo, because I think it's most difficult thing in the world to live in a
democracy eh and do your job. Uh it's much easier to live under any other form of government [ER laughs].[Lansing Shield: That's right. I--]

[ER:] But now, these inherent possibilities of our country are going to be realized too as quickly as more uh business adopts this unusually lighten-enlightened philosophy of yours. There's one more question I'd like to ask you, you may not like it--

[ER and Lansing Shield overlap]

[Lansing Shield:] Mrs. Roosevelt uh might I interrupt?

[ER:] Yes.

(32:32)

[Lansing Shield:] I just wanted to say eh something on that point. I don't want to create the impression that everything is perfect at Grand Union. We're just taking the initial steps and we hope that someday we'll be a lot better than we are today.

[ER:] Well, that's a nice point of view because I believe that when one is a bit humble, one usually is going to take new steps, and new steps are what built this country. Aren't they? [ER laughs]

[Lansing Shield:] Yes, that's true. Certainly is.

[ER:] Well, I want to ask one more question which you may not like. Um but it's a problem that vitally concerns all of us. After all, Grand Union people are selling a great many of us who are housewives our meat and groceries. And what do you think of our new price controls?

[Lansing Shield:] Well, uh knowing you, I'm sure you want the truth.

[ER:] Yes, I do. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] I want the truth.

[Lansing Shield:] Um as we all set ourselves up as authorities and economists and this is just one man's opinion, but I have felt uh for several months now that control should have been imposed immediately after the beginning of the Korean incident. And that the uh constant discussion by leaders and uh government uh of controls has uh resulted in much higher prices than we otherwise would have. We definitely need controls, I think everybody admits that. Uh whether they'll work is dependent uh on several factors. If our men in government and our men in business can uh put public service ahead of political and selfish interests they'll work.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

ER: Well, also if people can remember, that it's unpatriotic to buy-to buy in black and gray markets.

[Lansing Shield:] That's right.

[ER:] That-that [Lansing Shield: That--] depends on the people, I think.

[Lansing Shield:] That's what killed price control last time, [ER: Mhm] especially on meats. Uh some of us have recently recommended uh to the government a-a new way of handling meat controls. And that's the establishment of a meat authority uh oh-and this meat authority board would have representatives of
the public and the livestock men and the packers and the retailers, and it would take uh the uh regulations
and the enforcement of these regulations of government directly. And it would operate somewhat like the
authority here in New York, such as the Tri-Borough Bridge authority or the Port Authority. And we
think that there's a lot of merit in it and I know it's being considered down there.

[ER:] Well, it sounds as though it uh might be a very good thing. Um on the television show, which um I
had yesterday uh Secretary [Charles F.] Brannan um told us uh certain things that um he hoped uh would
be achieved. And there was a considerable, I think, feeling of um dissatisfaction at the disproportion
between what the actual consumer pays and what the farmer gets. That was the same old question I've
heard argued a million [Lansing Shield: Yes.] times. But [ER clears throat] it comes up again each time
and I never get quite a satisfactory answer. Because Secretary Brannan said yesterday, "if all the things
that were not uh at present, under control because they hadn't reached [Lansing Shield: Yes.] parity. Um
were to reach parity um it wouldn't amount to more than two percent um of everything. But I feel quite
sure, that when it came to the consumer, we would be paying more than two percent! [ER laughs]

[Lansing Shield:] Yes, because it would pyramid as you went along. [ER: Pyramid as you went along!] That's right, well --

[ER:] And I-I get very much um uh-- I-I really am-- was very anxious yesterday to get at some real facts
for people because people would give so much to really know what they ought to do and how it could be
done fairly and wisely.

[Lansing Shield:] I-I could send you up some facts that we have down at the office on that subject, which
are very interesting, I think-- indicating the proportion the retailer, for example, is taking out of the food
dollar.

[ER:] Well, I'd like to-to see it very much. [ER laughs]

[Lansing Shield:] Well, I'd be very glad to send them along; I don't know whether they'll be very
enlightening.

[Elliot Roosevelt:] Mother, I'm afraid I must interrupt again, I seem to be the-the bad moment on the
program always, but I'm afraid that our time is running short so I'm afraid you must bring the interview to
a close.

[ER:] Thank you so much for coming, Mr. Shield, it was awfully kind of you.

[Lansing Shield:] It was nice of you to invite me, thank you.

(37:35)