

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

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Description: In this segment, ER interviews Lucile Heming, a member of the national board of the League of Women Voters.

Participants: ER, Lucile Heming

[ER:] Thank you, Anna. Our guest today is Mrs. Lucile Heming, a long and active member of the League of Women Voters and a member of the League's National Board of Directors. Mrs. Heming has also served as president of the New York State League. Since the League of Women Voters is among the foremost of women's organizations in this country, most of us know something about it. But I'm sure Mrs. Heming could tell us a great deal that is interesting that we don't know. Could you outline for us, Mrs. Heming, the background and purpose of the League of Women Voters?

[Lucile Heming:] Yes, I'd be glad to, Mrs. Roosevelt. I'd like to start by pointing out what you probably know, and that is that our name is very misleading. It's really historical accident you know, because we were the successors to the Women's Suffrage Party. We're not just a women's organization, we're a citizens' organization. We have men who are members and young people who are not yet of voting age, and our purpose is to promote political responsibility through the active, informed participation of citizens in government. That's quite a handful of--mouthful rather, and we shorten that when we're asked by saying we want to let the people know, make them care, and help them act because we think every citizen is important. And any person who believes in our purpose is welcome at our meetings and welcome to subscribe to our publications. And as you know Mrs. Roosevelt, we're non-partisan, uh there's a place for everybody in the League, whether she's a busy housewife with just perhaps an hour a week to give or whether she has time for research. And we're particularly proud of our members who've gone on into important government positions. And I don't want to be personal, but I could, at this point, point out some of our League members who have gone on into very important and distinguished jobs, of whom we're very proud. (1:56)

[ER:] Well that's very kind of you to say that. And I know, of course, a good deal about your work. But I'd like-- I think a great many people might know something about the work you do in the international field. I know what good work you've done on the local level um with your "Know Your City" campaign and then on the state level with your "Know Your State" campaign. But I wondered how you were extending this now in the wider international field?

[Lucile Heming:] Well as you know, working for peace through international cooperation has been one of our primary concerns ever since we started back in 1920. And uh this year has been what we called "Know Your UN" year. We in the League have had "Know Your Town" and "Know Your State" campaigns and we're trying very hard now in every one of our 720 local organizations in this country to put the emphasis on the United Nations, and to adapt our program in such a way that everybody will be interested. In other words, we don't want to just reconvert those who already are converted to believing in the UN, we want to get out and reach the people who don't really know very much about it. And uh that means that uh we have to use all kinds of methods li-- that means interesting the teachers in the schools and people in clubs and the average person in her home. And we're trying to make it exciting and make everybody realize that you can't separate national and international issues any longer, any more than you can separate political and economic ones. We-we try to stress not only the political side of the UN, but uh all the specialized agencies and to point out that we have to work for reciprocal trade and international

trade organization as well as putting the emphasis on the Security Council, which is always the most dramatic part.

[ER:] Well I think uh that's very interesting but one of the difficult things is to tie the two things together, and most people are more interested in their own community happenings than in international things. And um I'm sure that you don't lessen the emphasis on the importance of the local community and its government, but I'd like to know how you tie it together so as to bring it down to the local level.

[Lucile Heming:] I think that uh the longer we work in the League, Mrs. Roosevelt, the more we feel that the local level is the most important because somehow that is where government can be made exciting and dramatic and real to the average person. Uh somebody has said that government is really just housekeeping on a glorified scale and it's at the local level that you can show people that. Because every uh housewife is interested in budgeting and uh the services that she gets and uh we let our local Leagues choose their own programs. Some of them work on uh rat extermination or garbage collection; of course lots of them as you know go into schools and housing, and the one thing that every local League is working on is what we call voter service. And that's just--that's not what merely pre-election work, it's a year-round thing. We believe that everybody has a responsibility all year round uh for uh selecting the candidates, for getting to know what they stand for, and then for following them up afterwards. We believe that uh democracy, like charity, I guess, begins at home and that all of the principles that we subscribe to must be carried out in our daily life and of course that applies to the Human Rights Declaration particularly. (5:36)

[ER:] That's very interesting to me of course working on the Human Rights. Is there anything briefly you'd like to ask me before we close?

[Lucile Heming:] Yes, I'd like to very much, Mrs. Roosevelt. Uh from your experience, uh are government officials really interested in hearing from the individual or are they influenced solely by pressure groups?

[ER:] Oh they're interested in hearing from the individual, especially an individual in their own communities who takes the trouble to write as an individual, because they know if they're elected officials that anyone who takes the trouble to write will also take the trouble to work in the community and in the campaign. I thank you for being our guest today, Mrs. Heming and for telling us about the work of the League of Women Voters. And now back to my daughter, Anna, in Hollywood.

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