

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

December 15th, 1948 (catalog date)

Description: ER and Anna Roosevelt talk about long range solutions to US and Soviet relations and the threat of communists in US borders. They also discuss the success and failures of the Marshall Plan.

Participants: ER, Anna Roosevelt

[Anna Roosevelt:] Uh Mother, there are several questions about Russia, and its beliefs, which seem to stick in a lot of people's craws. For instance, you yourself have often spoken and written about the difficulties you've had in arguments with United Nations delegates from Russia and the Soviet satellite countries. Why, at the close of the United Nations assembly just a few days ago Mr. [Andrey] Vyshinsky, Russia's foreign minister, was quoted as saying that the meeting produced no successes at all and that it was dominated by, and I quote, "Those who are inciting a new world war against the Soviet Union and the New Democracies," end of quote. What do you think is the long-range answer to your troubles with these delegates as well as to Mr. Vyshinsky's accusation?

[ER:] Well, in the first place you have to remember that what the USSR delegate uh Mr. Vyshinsky said didn't really make the slightest difference. The uh point is he had to say something to make it uh [Anna Roosevelt: An impression?] an excuse for what had been going on. Now no nation is impervious to the fact that not just uh the United States is opposed to them but that over and over again practically every nation that they were up against was opposed to them. There were many votes in which they alone were in the minority. Now that uh finally makes a dent, and I think that that's one of the important things about the United Nations, that that dent can finally be made. Now it's quite true uh you find great difficulties in dealing with the USSR. Uh they have um perhaps a fear of what may be done to them in this world. Uh that may be one thing. [Anna Roosevelt: They seem to definitely have a fear.] Well the other thing may be that they also have a determination to dominate the whole world. Now those two things we have to face as a long, drawn out um argument that we're going to have to go through. We have to build confidence and bring new convictions to them. Now that isn't going to happen overnight. It's going to require strength on our part, strength in a military way but also strength in a spiritual and intellectual way. And that takes time, it takes infinite patience, it takes understanding on our part and gradual education on their part. I'm not a bit discouraged but I sometimes hope that we will have more courage and determination than we have. (2:59)

[Anna Roosevelt:] I hope we do too. Now there's one final que-question mother that I'd like to ask you on the USSR and its ideologies. You know there are a lot of people who complain about this country's allowing foreigners to come in the United States. Foreigners, who may be communist at heart or who, worse yet, are actually trained communists masquerading as just plain citizens from other countries. There's a fear that our immigration officials can't possibly detect these people, that once they get in here they will be the kind who will continually be making trouble. Trying to get strikes started, trying to get secret information out of our government, and trying to get into positions of real responsibility in unions, in business, and of course in government. And all with the objective of causing trouble here. Then they can point a figure-a finger at us and say, "You see, your kind of democracy doesn't work." Now what do you think, Mother, are the dangers of allowing foreigners to come into this country?

[ER:] I think we ought to divide the way foreigners come in. There's a big group now that ought to come in from the displaced persons camps in Europe. Many of them are people who have suffered uh because they left their countries, which are now USSR dominated. You'll find that many people wanting to come

in come from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine uh because they cannot go back--they disagree with the present government of their country. Now those people uh are not coming over here to make trouble for us. Now it is true that uh people quite evidently uh will try to come over as Russian agents. That's up to our Department of Justice to watch. It's not so hard to find out; you can tell very quickly when people are trying to make trouble in unions or in various organizations where they're working. A communist is not—

[Anna Roosevelt: Can spot them fast?] Yes. A communist is not so difficult to discover if you know what to look for. And I think if we left a little bit more in the hands of our FBI who, on the whole, are pretty efficient and were not afraid of people who have suffered under USSR ideas and who are probably the safest citizens because they cannot be persuaded to have anything to do with a police state if they can possibly keep out of it. If we can do that I think the main thing for us is to believe in our democracy and make it a living thing.

[Anna Roosevelt:] Well, now Mother there's something else I'd like to ask you. I know from what you've said that on the whole you're pleased with the Human Rights Bill as it was passed by this last session of the United Nations Assembly. The only one thing about it as it stands now which I think may bother some of us is that while the intentions are good, it seems to me there are people who are going to feel that the Human Rights Bill is just a bunch of words--words that sound good from the standpoint of protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals in the world, but words which actually mean nothing. They're not the law of any land; it's just up to the nations to follow them if they feel like it. Obviously any nation which wants to will ignore them. Uh for instance I'm sure we can be quite certain that Russia isn't going to suddenly liberate her millions of slave laborers just because of a few high sounding and strong words. What do you think about this Mother?

[ER:] Well I think you have to remember that this is only the first half of the Bill of Rights; that the Declaration had to exist before any covenants could be written. Covenants are like treaties, when a nation ratifies them, they have to change their laws. A declaration stands very much on the same ground as national declarations have stood in the past. Magna Carta changed a great many things all the way down the line of history. [Anna Roosevelt: Many years ago.] But it was just a declaration of intention and we could say the same thing about our own Declaration of Independence and about the French Declaration of the Rights of Man. So words you know have a curious effect on facts, they so often become facts. Now that's one reason we didn't want the declaration to be uh cast in a form which anyone could consider was a legal document. Because we could say things in it, therefore, which went beyond what probably any country today would accept in a legal document and yet, there are those things stated as the rights and freedoms that men should have throughout the world. And this is the first time that so many nations have joined together in accepting a declaration. From that point of view I think its moral impact should be very great. It will only be great if people get to know it. If children study it in school, if in the universities they argue about it, and if all over this country people read the document and say, "I don't like this," or "I do like that." It'll become a living thing and an influence.

[Anna Roosevelt:] And gradually become a habit. Now, uh, Mother, I'd like to ask you one more thing. How do you think the Marshall Plan is actually working out in Europe? In talking to people over there, not only government officials but just plain citizens, what reactions did you get from them? Do the people realize the importance of it in rehabilitating themselves?

[ER:] Well, I'm afraid that the people, the little people, have heard a great deal about the Marshall Plan, but they understand it about as well as many of our own citizens understand it. Our own citizens have heard [Anna Roosevelt: Not very clearly.] a great deal about the Marshall Plan but they couldn't really tell you how it works. Well I've seen a good many people--I asked my chauffeur one day just how he felt

[Anna Roosevelt: in Paris?] In Paris. How he felt the Marshall Plan affected him. And he turned around and he said. "I've heard about it. Mr. Marshall is a nice man," and that was just exactly all that he really actually knew. Now the people who operate it-- the industrialists, the workers, some of them in the factories, the leaders among them--do really know that there would be no work if it wasn't for the Marshall Plan which got them raw materials and made it possible for the factories to open up again if it wasn't for the credits. And they know uh but the-the individual uh many-many of the individuals who find prices of food very high I doubt if people over here realize that the French workman in a city today pays 80 percent of his income for his food. Luckily there's a ceiling on rents. He has very poor housing because the people who own the houses haven't gotten enough out of the rents to do any repairs. So the housing is going down by the minute but nevertheless as long as he has to pay eighty percent for his food of his income it's mighty lucky he pays so little for his rent. But he has nothing left for clothes or for pleasure or for the other things that we think essential. And without the Marshall Plan he'd have even less, so vaguely he knows, and vaguely he's trying to work and I hope he'll succeed.

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