

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

February 5, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the United States support of un-democratic countries. In the interview segment, ER's guest is Vincent Impellitteri, mayor of New York City.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Vincent Impellitteri

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[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, uh here's a question sent in eh by Mrs. Irene Gilbert of Brooklyn. Eh You've touched on the subject before but Mrs. Gilbert is a little more specific than the other question. Here it is. I wish to raise a question and trust that you will see fit to undertake its' answer. Isn't it singularly strange that in utilizing and expending our resources for the preservation of democracy we espouse, support, defend, protect and help to preserve governments which our newspaper correspondents as well as others concede are tyrannical, unpopular, undemocratic and therefore undesirable. I refer to the governments of Chiang Kai-Shek, Syngman Rhee, the present Greek government, as well as the [Francisco] Franco regime in Spain. In addition to the ones the lady has mentioned I would say Mr. Tito's government in Yugoslavia and most South American [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] governments.

[ER:] Well, that's that is a-a difficult question but I think the answer to it lies in the fact that um you have to realize that in the world people reach different stages of development. Probably the election by the people of Syngman Rhee came about because he had stood for the freedom of Korea. He had lived outside of Korea since Japan had taken it over, but he had always worked and agitated for the freedom of the country, so when the UN supervised a first free election, it was not astounding that the people, who were not accustomed to electing at all, should elect the one person who meant to them an interest in freedom of their country. Now, as they probably live under a more free government than they have ever had before, it is likely that they will aspire to different kinds of government, just as we had certain things happening in our early history which we would today think were very far from eh freedom and democracy. I think if you will just look up some of the old blue laws in Massachusetts you will find that um people lived under pretty strict laws, you were forbidden, for instance, to kiss your wife on Sunday. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh] And you were also forbidden to do quite a number of other things which I think we would think were a restraint of our freedom today [Elliott Roosevelt: yeah]! Now, eh I've taken Syngman Rhee as an example eh people forget--

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap] (3:15)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well of course I think that's rather an unfair example, I'm much more interested in for instance uh-ah the question of eh-eh we have-we have a policy a foreign policy now that states that whatever government comes into power in any uh Latin American country, whether it's by violence or force, we will recognize it immediately. Ah why is it that we have that policy when we are committed to -

[ER:] Well I didn't know we had agreed that we would recognize it immediately I thought that we were taking the same attitude in South America that we have taken uh largely throughout um a fairly long period now, namely that after a government has shown that it actually uh does control the country, that then we must acknowledge that that is the government of that country, it may change, but that is the government at present, and we must have representatives in that country and we must deal with that government. Now it's not our business-- [Elliott Roosevelt: We didn't take that attitude with Franco.] No

because right after the last war there was a great wave of feeling eh against all uh fascist or Nazi or uh governments, and Franco was the one dictator who had played with um very closely [Elliott Roosevelt: with Hitler and Mussolini.] with Hitler and Mussolini.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well he came to power with their support.

[ER:] Came to power with their support. Therefore, in the United Nations there was a resolution passed, in the hope of strengthening the Spanish people if they wished to overthrow their government eh Franco. [Elliott Roosevelt: mhm mhm] uh, nothing happened and we have returned to our old attitude, namely, that when a government stays in power and apparently is stable we must at least, even though we disapprove of that government, we must at least carry on diplomatic relations and ordinary um intercourse with the government through diplomatic and economic channels. Now um I don't happen to like it in the case of eh Franco, because I think there is very little freedom in Spain, but I think it's a logical position on our part and I would do nothing to interfere with the logic of that position. I would hope, however, that we would do all in our power to show that where a government is an oppressive government, even though it has control of a country, uh continuing diplomatic relations does not mean that we like that type of government. It simply means that it's there and that we have to deal with it, I don't think we should say that we approve of it or like it. (6:31)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh-ah, I know that you eh particularly don't like it in the case of Franco. What would be your feeling with regard to [Juan] Perón in Argentina?

[ER:] I don't like it as regards to Perón.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright, now we come to Mr. [Josip] Tito in Yugoslavia.

[ER:] I don't like eh totalitarian governments anywhere but eh where Mr. Tito is concerned, he evidently has the allegiance of the people, perhaps because he fought with them for freedom [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] and was their leader as they fought for freedom and it may well be that the Yugoslav people, I think, have a kind of fierce uh personal uh sense of-of individuality. Eh that may mean that there will be a modification of the type of dictatorship in time. I don't know that, I don't know any more, anything more about it than anyone else, [Elliott Roosevelt: uh huh] but I have a feeling that they have never been able to impose on the Yugoslavs quite the type of personal slavery of mind that they have been able to impose on uh the representatives of government in the USSR [Elliott Roosevelt: mhm]. Um and uh so it may be that we are going to see more of what we would call um an increase in democracy and less of the totalitarian system. I would hope that that would be so, though I realize well that anywhere where you get a police state changes are extremely difficult, and I think Tito has at present, [Elliott Roosevelt mumbles] partly because he is uh surrounded by enemies, a pretty complete police state.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright well now that leads me on to another uh point in-in this whole question and that is uh America's position in regard to supporting colonialism, for instance in French Indochina. Uh bu-- for the mere fact that we put ourselves in the unpopular position eh in the whole Asiatic world as against the communistic position which is they must have their freedom and we're gonna support their freedom and all that sort of thing and we take the attitude of supporting our French colonial system. Uh [ER: well] that's true in, all over Asia we have a bad reputation of not espousing the de-democratic principles.

[ER:] Well, I-I personally think that the reason for which we have opposed um in some countries the revolutionary elements is because it is fairly clear that those elements are supported by the Communist groups. And therefore we find ourselves in a contradictory situation because ordinarily we would probably support and urge upon our allied uh nations the wisdom of creating independent nations that

enter the federation in the way India eh is now connected with Great Britain, but is an independent nation and I think uh the way Indonesia is an independent nations though she is connected still [ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap] [Elliott Roosevelt: with the Dutch] with the Dutch. I think that would be the picture that we would encourage normally, I think where we find ourselves really supporting the colonial power, it 'tis because the revolutionary power within the country has very evidently uh the support of the communists. And because we're opposed to communism we find ourselves doing [Elliott Roosevelt: just the opposite of what-what] this sort of complicated situation. Now it's-it's-it's the not perhaps a wise thing I don't know but it's a perfectly normal, natural thing to find yourself doing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I wish we could carry this conversation on longer but I think we have to get on to another part of the program right now. (11:13)

[Pause from 11:13 to 11:28]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Next to the President of the United States, the man who bears one of the greatest administrative burdens in this country is the mayor of the city of New York, so Mother and I are particularly grateful to our guest today for taking time from his busy life to be here. Uh, Mother I think eh you should greet our guest his Honor Mayor Impellitteri.

[ER:] I'm very happy to have you with us Mr. Mayor. [ER laughs]

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Thank you very much Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm always happy to be with you.

[ER:] Thank you. Well, now there are so many questions I want to ask you that I hardly know how to begin. I think first of all I'll ask you to say what you feel it would be well to say to the people on the eh government of the city of New York. Because, of course, this goes to many other stations outside of New York, and I think there's a great deal of interest in how one goes about such a tremendous undertaking as this.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] It's a very broad eh question Mrs. Roosevelt, but I'll do my best to try to answer it. Uh-uh as Elliott has pointed out, eh this is really a big job. Eh we have almost eight million people eh within the city of New York and uh--

[ER:] Every race and creed.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Every race and creed, and that's one of the things we're proud of. We're proud of the fact that we do have eh so many people from all of the corners of the Earth. Different colors, different religious creeds, different national origins, yep, here in the city of New York they all live side-by-side, their children play together, they go to school together and we have absolutely no difficulty uh in any of these tensions that we read about in the countries from which they originally came.

[ER:] Mr. Mayor, I must tell you something interesting. One Christmas, I decided that it would be interesting to try to collect from different backgrounds certain Christmas foods, and I found that right here in the city of New York, I could get a wide selection of candy and little cakes and all sorts of things by just going into different sections of the city [ER laughs]. [Vincent Impellitteri: that's--] So I'm very well aware of the variety of our people in this city.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Uh and uh that's-that's true Mrs. Roosevelt, a-and along the same lines it's-it's interesting, but right her in the city of New York we've-- there's published, I'd say, approximately eh fifty to sixty foreign-language newspapers that have a wide circulation. It only points up what you originally brought out and that's one of the reasons and I know that this would be of particular interest to

you because you're familiar with it, you've taken such an active part in the United Nations and you've had such a wonderful record of achievement there that uh, I had a lot to do with eh-eh the city's invitations to bring the United Nations here to the city of New York. We're very happy that they came. And one of the reasons uh-uh we fought for that invitation, which cost the city considerable money, but we're happy that we did it. Because we felt that in this atmosphere, the delegates of the United Nations uh seeing how people lived here in the city of New York in perfect harmony, might start off with a good background for world peace. (15:02)

[ER:] Well I've taken you away from the government of the city of New York but I'm delighted because that is just the way I feel about that too.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] I know that.

[ER:] Now let's get back to our own.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Well here eh we have eight million people uh-uh we have uh a simplified form of government. We have a legislative arm which is called the city council eh the city council uh-uh enacts, initiates all the laws that affect the-the lives and the government of the of the people of the city of New York. But that's just one side of it, that's the legislative arm. But the real governing body of the city is made up of the Board of Estimate. The Board of Estimate is composed of the mayor, the comptroller, the president o-of the council. They are elected city-wide; they're elected by all the people within the city. And then there is five borough presidents, each borough president is elected by the people within his own borough, Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, Richmond and Kings. Eh the those eight men make up the elected membership of the Board of Estimate, that's really the governing arm of the city. Everything that affects the pocket book of the city, everything that affects the policy of the city must be brought up before a public hearing at the Board of Estimate, and the Board of Estimate either approves or disapproves. That--

[ER:] Must you hear any uh for instance, any citizens' group that asks for a hearing?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] We, under the law, we must hear any group or any individual who cares to be heard at a public hearing. Eh, in addition to that the Board of Estimate, under the law, must publish a calendar which is available to citizens, to civic organizations, free of charge. That calendar is printed at city expense. Thereafter, on the date of the public hearing, which occurs approximately once every two weeks, uh before uh a vote can be taken on any item, the public is entitled to be heard and believe me they are heard. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laugh].

[ER:] I'm sure they are I'm sure they come in great numbers.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] They do, we-we have eh full attendance at every session of the Board of Estimate.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well Mr. Mayor could I ask a question? Eh it seems to me eh the Board of Estimate eh sets for instance such things as eh how the funds are to be raised which will run the government of the city of New York, which will keep the schools open and keep the eh streets in order and run the police department and all the thousands of things that the city government does. But as I understand it the state government eh-uh has a certain control over the operations of the city government. How does that work?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Eh now that's an extremely difficult question because the question you pose, is very proper, but it's such a long hard question to answer. Eh the city eh-uh necessarily has to raise its' own funds for eh its' own operations, but there are a great number of tie-ins eh where the-the state must eh-eh necessarily under the law eh-eh give the city certain permissive forms of taxations. And uh-uh there's a great number of features that eh are so complicated, that I don't think it would uh enlighten the-

the radio audience at all for me to try to explain it [Elliott Roosevelt: yes]. But there are a great number of tie-ins a great number of occasions when the city must go to the state to seek approval to put into effect things that really only affect the city of New York but nevertheless we must go to Albany for uh legislations. (19:18)

[ER:] And Albany must give permission.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Eh in a great number of cases.

[ER:] Of cases. Do they also give help in certain cases, [Vincent Impellitteri: eh] for instance, on schools?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Yes, they-they do uh-uh those of us who run the city don't think we get anywhere near enough [ER: I see]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] in proportion to what the people of the city of New York give to the state.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] That's our feeling here in New York, [ER: Yes] we-we feel that we contribute the- the uh lion's share of the total amount of taxes that are taken uh in b-by the state, and we feel that here in the city of New York we should receive a more equitable return.

[ER:] Now what about eh you have eh what would go by the name of a cabinet don't you in-in the administering of the city?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] A very large cabinet, a very large cabinet uh-uh you here in the city of New York we have a great number of so-called departments, eh the Police Department, the Fire Department, the Sanitation department, the Welfare department, the Correction department, the Markets department, the Department of Marine and Aviation. Eh each one of those departments is a large department in and of itself. You eh can realize that when uh-uh I tell you that we have an army eh a hundred and eighty thousand city employees. Now each one eh of those departments is headed up by a commissioner who serves at the pleasure of the mayor. Now, eh therefore, eh each one of those commissioners would be a member of the mayor's cabinet, so that the mayor eh-eh wanted to find out something about the police department he would necessarily confer with the police commissioner, fire department with the fire commissioner. [ER: Transportation] transportation with the uh commissioners of the Board of Transportation. Eh so that eh I would say, in the broad sense, that each one of those commissioners is a member of the mayor's cabinet.

[ER:] And actually each one has to be a businessman, I imagine, to run his department, because it must be a business proposition.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Definitely he-he has a full time job uh-uh not only handling the personnel, give and take in some of those departments there's as many as forty thousand employees. And another interesting thing about that eh very few people eh, eh realize, people eh very frequently, eh on the-the average person has the idea that most of those employees are so-called political plums or political appointees. The fact of the matter is that almost ninety-five percent of all our employees are strictly civil service that are appointed on the basis of a competitive civil service examination and promoted the same way. (22:05)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mr. Mayor eh I think it might be interesting to the audience to know just uh how big is the police department of the City of New York, and the fire department, and the Sanitation Department. How many employees in each of those three?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Uh roughly I would say in the police department we have approximately twenty thousand men, all appointed by competitive civil service. And I would say to you that today, forget about the old-time cop. Eh Today the uh New York City policeman is a very intelligent young man. Eh I would say to you that eh unless he has the minimum of a high-school education and preferably a college education he would stand eh very little if any chance of passing a very-very eh difficult eh mental as well as physical examination. In the fire department the same rule applies, I would say that we have approximately ten thousand firemen. Sanitation I would say that we have eh and I'm not certain about this, but I would say approximately twelve thousand.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's very interesting. I think we must take a few seconds off for our station break and then we'll come back to this interview because mother has many questions to ask of you about what the city does for its' citizens.

(Pause from 23:31 to 23:41)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now mother would you take over again on our interview of His Honor Mayor Impellitteri of the city of New York.

[ER:] I'll be very glad to because there are a number of things I want to know. The first one is a rather eh-eh personal question eh as to the running of your own office, sir. I eh have a great number of letters come into me and every now and then and it seems as though they should go to someone in the city government, eh an appeal about housing or an appeal about some welfare condition or child-- and eh I always feel like a perfect fool when I send it to the mayor because I know quite well the mayor never could possible read all the things that are sent. Eh how-how do you manage in your own office about the enormous mail you must get and the delegation of authority to other people?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] That eh is a question that even puzzles me [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]. I-I would say that eh-eh I receive on an average four to five to six thousand pieces of mail every day. Eh I necessarily have to rely on what I feel is a competent staff. Uh if eh they open every one of those letters every day and the ones that they eh feel should come to my personal attention are placed upon my desk. If it's a-a if it's a-a request for welfare assistance, it's referred from the mayor's office to the commissioner of welfare, if it's affects the police department it's referred to the commissioner of police. Uh without question uh-uh I haven't the slightest doubt that some of those letters that should be placed on my desk eh-eh might not find their way there they might-

[ER:] No I think they shouldn't be, I think a-eh top executive should really have a system worked out whereby anything that can be taken care of somewhere else should be taken care of because your time should not be taken up with that mail. But I just wondered eh you've-you've outlined the sensible procedure which I think should be um followed up on but I-I often wonder eh this business of investigating eh is such a difficult business now I know half the time that the appeals one gets are not bona fide appeals or have eh are only partially true, do you see, in the statement of facts. Uh and yet you don't like to ignore then and you forward them and then you wonder how much real investigation-- now in each of the departments do eh you have an investigating group that eh does look into traces, cases that come up like that? (26:47)

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Oh definitely eh-eh you've taken the city of New York, as a matter of fact we have our own Department of Investigation. And eh if it's a complaint, for instance, that would eh-eh raise a question of integrity eh of a city of employee or anyone in a particular department, eh that eh complaint would be sent to the commissioner of investigation who has a large staff of investigators, trained investigators, to do exactly that kind of work.

[ER:] Well I remember it one time, this is a silly story, but I'm going to tell it to you. I remember at one time having on pretty good authority eh, a complaint that eh certain people were buying immunity from eh inspection on certain things. Eh-eh regular people would appear and go into a back room and then would say, eh-eh little consideration and we won't go eh too deeply into this question and uh I turned in the information that came to me, and eh the person who had told me about it came back smilingly to me and said they'd been investigated by that day who always come and taken the money [ER laughs]. And said that was because of course they'd gone to that department, you see, and they'd sent the people whom I suppose they trusted, eh and they were the very people who had been taking the money. [ER laughs] And that struck me as very funny never have I quite know how you were going to get around it.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Well now eh that's one of the things that probably was handled in a routine way which deserved eh special attention. Now I think eh a complaint of that kind should have gone to either one of two departments. It should have gone to the Department of Investigation, and then a separate force of investigator's who were not connected to any department at all would go in and investigate. Or if the facts disclosed the crime eh as in the instance you pointed out. I sometimes would refer eh a matter like that directly to the District Attorney.

[ER:] Mhm I see, well that's eh that's something interesting to know because I remember hearing about that. Now I want to get to one of two things that I am very much interested in. As you know, Mr. Mayor, welfare in general and particularly child welfare is of great interest to me, and I follow with a good deal of interest because I happen to be on the board, the work of the Citizen's Committee on Children, which eh does no actual work itself but tries to follow the work of all the other groups that are eh doing work in the area of child welfare. And um I wondered if you could tell me how you felt now the children of the city were fairing.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Well I think that eh here in the city of New York we're doing everything humanly possible to eh improve eh all of our agencies that has anything to do with um child welfare. We have an excellent eh commissioner of welfare in Commissioner Ray Hilliard and since he has taken over the Department of Welfare, in my judgment uh and I think that that judgment is shared by all of the agencies that have anything to do with child welfare, point out that-that Commissioner Hilliard has really done a wonderful job. Uh you've taken, eh-eh in all of the eh our housing developments uh we have uh special rooms set aside for child care where the children receive uh dental attention and they receive medical attention, you have trained workers who work right there in the housing development. (30:42)

[ER:] Well I'm interested, I didn't know that. I went up the other day to see one of your housing developments uh uptown off Park Avenue. And the interesting thing to me was that the city of New York has no segregation, and uh yet I couldn't see that eh everything wasn't as full and as beautifully kept [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] as uh it is in most housing developments that are new and-and clean and modern. And eh I went to see a model apartment that the Hunter College students had furnished very nicely as um an aid to other people, on a budget. And eh but I was struck by this eh question of non-segregation in a city housing thing because I always feel that housing is at the basis of so many of our troubles, our delinquent children and all those things, and now if you tell me these services for children are being eh-eh given in the housing developments I think that's a wonderful thing to do.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] All of the other agencies cooperate with the housing authority in setting up these services, many times right within the housing development itself. I'm-I'm happy that you pointed out about uh-uh the non-segregation in our housing developments. As a matter of fact that's part of the organic law, both the city, the state and the federal government insist that wherever public funds are used in housing that uh there must be a non-discrimination clause. Here in the city of New York um-uh we have torn down, in that in the furtherance of that program, many slum areas and built decent low-cost clean housing to actually transfer a 193,000 persons and that program is still going on --

[ER:] That's fine we need more.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] That's right, and we're our program is going ahead full blast and I'm happy to tell you that in every one of those housing developments, public housing developments, there's non-discrimination clauses, we have mixed tenancies and we haven't experienced the slightest bit of difficulty.

[ER:] Well I'm delighted to hear that. Will you have trouble because of allocations of material now?

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Uh that's a question that-that's fraught with a great deal off misgiving. We hope to uh be permitted to go ahead with all of our housing projects, our hospital projects, our school projects because we feel that they're vitally necessary to the city. However uh-uh-uh the national government has the power to eh put in controls, to put in a eh-eh a system of priorities and if that's necessary uh for the preservation of uh what our lawmakers in Washington think might be necessary for uh national defense, we will have to go along. But I've already appeared in Washington and uh-uh made a strong plea that our housing, our hospitals, our schools be permitted to continue on with our programs- [Vincent Impellitteri and ER overlap]

[ER:] Seems to me that's almost part-of-of the defense of the country and that's the way I would feel on that. But uh I want to ask you a little about civilian defense, because I realize that when one is not at war it's very hard to make people to do the things that uh they look upon as war measures, and I wondered if you were having difficulty in your civilian defense setups? (34:31)

[Vincent Impellitteri:] We have had difficulty we eh we've eh been keenly alert to the need for civil defense, and as a matter of fact our civil defense program has actually been underway for almost seven months. Uh we have as head of our civil defense unit uh Arthur Wallander, the former commissioner of police and the same gentleman who headed up civil defense during World War number two. We've appropriated a-approximately two and a half million dollars on our civil defense program, which only begins to scratch the surface. But we've tried to alert the people of the city to the necessity for proper preparation. T-The program now is coming along alright, but as you pointed out Mrs. Roosevelt, uh it takes eh-eh almost a Pearl Harbor to uh really get the American people into a state of mind where they want to do something about it. So far we have haven't had that, and let's hope that we do not. But eh I think now the people are starting to become more and more aware and are starting to listen and our recruiting program has really picked up.

[ER:] It has picked up. [Vincent Impellitteri: Yes] Well that is that is really very good, because of course, um I feel that we might do a little more with-with women perhaps by bringing over uh some people who've had to do some of this work eh-eh under attack in countries like France and Holland and-and places in England and so forth, uh but it's hard to keep them alerted.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother I'm afraid I must interrupt, the time has just about run out now and I'm afraid that uh this will be the end of our interview period.

[ER:] Oh I'm sorry because there are many more things I'd like to know Mr. Mayor, but I'm very grateful to you for coming to be with us today.

[Vincent Impellitteri:] Thank you for inviting me. (36:37)

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