

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

May 15, 1951

Description: This episode was recorded in London. In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the United States' responsibility in keeping global peace while also arming allies. In the interview segment, ER's guest is English car manufacturer William Rootes.

Participants: ER, Elliott, Sir William Rootes

[ER:] How do you do? This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking to you from Europe, where I'm attending the meeting of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] This is another in our series of programs recorded in England especially for your listening at home and flown to the United States through special arrangement with Swiss Air. Here in England, the Rootes Group, manufacturers of automobiles, are similar to our own General Motors. Sir William Rootes, chairman of the group and also one of the original sponsors of the American council for relations with other countries, is Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today. You will meet him a little later on in the program, but now, as soon as we've heard from the sponsors who make this recorded program possible, we're going to discuss a matter of general interest to all of us.

[Break 1:04-1:11]

[ER:] What have you as to questions today, Elliott?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, Mother, I have a question uh from a Mr. Saunders over in Brooklyn, who writes and-and uh says as follows, "I am a disabled Air Force veteran, age twenty-four, and now an elementary school teacher in New York City. My question is simple, but one that I've discussed constantly without finding an answer. What will what we are doing lead to? Will we continue building arms, armed forces, and power forever? How can we possibly find peace in this world? I majored in history and have never been able to find an instance where soldiers, arms, and a wartime economy have ever led to peace. Can it now?"

[ER:] You're quite right, it's never happened in--before. And the only way it can possibly happen now um is for the people of the United States to be more mature than they've ever been before. And if they are mature enough to realize that what they are doing is to build force for peace um and to make up their minds they will not be tempted to use that force to create for themselves greater power in the world, then I think we can really use it for peace. But if we are tempted or allow our government to be tempted then it will have the same results it's had in the past.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, that's uh that's true, but uh-uh aren't we supposedly uh providing ourselves with a safety valve? Are not the forces that we are building supposedly going to be controlled and uh put into action only where the United Nations, as an organization which is comprised of many nations, agree that it--that this force should be utilized?

[ER:] Not all of them and not uh at present. Um at the present moment, of course, we are arming much more quickly than we would do if we were not the most powerful nation--I mean the nation best able to uh arm. Um and therefore it devolves upon us very greatly to recognize the fact that we are doing it in the defense, not only of our own country, but of the peace of the world. And um it should stop immediately

um when we reach any kind of agreement by which all force is reduced on an equal basis, and in a way that will give security to people. That is why, when the Russians ask for a third reduction in armament from everyone, we have always been obliged to refuse because it would leave Russia uh in greater power than any other nation. And--but if we can get an honest inspection, which is not just the type of inspection that Russia is willing to accept, which is an inspection of declared plants, but a real honest to goodness inspection um and a reduction which is really all the way round, then, I think, uh we will be able to begin on the disarmament and to keep within the UN and under UN's call forces to use against any aggressor, but at present uh we are arming beyond the point of just giving the UN full control of all our forces. (5:39)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, now I come to a much more difficult one for you to answer. We're not only arming ourselves, we're arming a great many other nations. What uh right have we to believe that our allies are going to exercise this willpower and self-control not to go beyond the point of using these powers except for defensive purposes? How do we know that, for instance, the Western European powers may not turn these arms against each other?

[ER:] Well, it's been a long while since uh-uh many of the present western democracies uh had any real difficulty uh among themselves. I'm not talking about Germany now. I'm talking about [Elliott Roosevelt: Ah yes, but--] Holland and the Scandinavian countries and France and Belgium and-and um that area—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but we're talking about taking in Spain now, and France and Spain don't always get along very well, and we're also talking about rearming Germany.

[ER:] Well, I haven't heard yet any real plans for taking in Spain into the United Nations—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] The agitation is there very strongly.

[ER:] There is some agitation, but as far as I've heard there is only, at present, um an effort to re-establish diplomatic relationships and that is all. An effort to—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] How long do you think it'll be?

[ER:] That is all we've agreed to, and plus the fact that specialized agencies of a regulatory character that desire to invite Spain to join may do so—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now, Mother, let's be perfectly honest. Now what is really the real reason why the argument is put forward that we should bring Spain in? It isn't about special regulatory bodies. The military have stated time and time again that they would like to have Spain as a part of the western uh [ER: Yes, and I've seen some of our--] group for military purposes.

[ER:] Well, I've seen some of our senators' statements, that the only place, if there came a war with Russia, which could be defended, is beyond the Pyrenees, and therefore uh we should have uh access to airfields there and we should bring Spain in. I'm not convinced of that. I haven't yet decided what I think on that subject, and I'm not willing as yet to say that I really think that is necessary. Since I'm not yet willing to say that we have got to take it for granted that we are going to have an all-out war, I hope that everything we do is done with the idea that we're going to prevent an all-out war, and going to prevent a division of the world.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, but we still come back to the question of giving arms. Now, a change of the balance of power in the political atmosphere in this country could very easily bring about a very pro-German feeling that would call for all-out armament of Western Germany. Now, if that takes place uh

there is the ever-present feeling, at least as expressed by most of the uh top uh diplomatic people from the Western European nations that Germany might not even side with us. That they might use whatever armaments we gave them for--against them.

[ER:] Well, I have always supposed that we would not um count upon um re-arming Germany to the point of having an army that could be valuable either--really valuable to the West or the East. Um I um I don't know. But it has always seemed to me that wisdom would lie along the path of strong--of not allowing ourselves, if we can possibly prevent it, though now we are being slightly pushed to it, um to really uh be pushed to any lengths in arming Germany by the fact that the Eastern Germans are being rearmed by the Russians. Now my own feeling is that if we could come to an understanding that Eastern Germany was not to be re-armed, and that we would um really have one Germany that was a united Germany um and that had not strong armament at all, police force type of thing, that on the whole uh they would be more content and perhaps the rest of Europe would be more content.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, to sum up in answer to this question, uh your hope is that this armament uh will only be used as a preventive uh force to prevent the Soviet Union from using their great stockpile of armaments.

[ER:] That's it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now uh what hope do you hold forth that the Soviet Union will not continue this uh armament race?

[ER:] Well, I don't think uh that the Soviet people want war any more than we want war, and I don't think their government will dare to put their people into war unless they are very sure that they have the upper hand.

[Break 11:37-11:44]

[ER:] To give us a clearer understanding of the British economic picture, in particular as it affects the individual and of its relation to the world economic structure, I am happy to have with me in London today Sir William Rootes, chairman of the Rootes Group and chairman of the British Motor Manufacturers. He is also one of the leading industrialists of the world today. I present Sir William Rootes.

[William Rootes:] Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm delighted to be here.

[ER:] It's very nice of you to come, Sir William. Now I know that by far one of the most important happenings in Great Britain today is the new budget. Would you explain what this means to the individual?

[William Rootes:] Well, to explain any budget is always a difficult task. But this particular one is perhaps easier because it's the heaviest budget of all time in Great Britain. Any chancellor of the exchequer would have a difficult problem today to cope with our current economy. But no chancellor can find sacrifices at this stage to any great extent that our people can carry in a greater extent than they are at the moment.

[ER:] Well, you really mean that the sacrifice has been going on for so long that um there really is nothing more they can--they can be asked to do?

[William Rootes:] Well, without breaking completely down our economy, [ER coughs] and that really is the fundamental situation in this country today. Had it not have been for the general's help that we've had

from the United States, and I doubt sometimes even then whether people realize the burden that the people of Great Britain have carried in the United Kingdom since 1940.

[ER:] Tell us in detail a little about it.

[William Rootes:] Well, taxation has almost reached a breaking point where the public can no longer endure it because it's doing away with all incentives. The working man is carrying his full share, as well as the rich or the high-paid executive.

[ER:] Well, what, for instance, would a working man's share be out of his daily wages?

[William Rootes:] A successful working man in this country and when I say that, I-I mean a man--married man with two children. Let's assume in America, he earned 4,200 dollars a year. His taxation in this country would be roughly four times that of the same worker in the United States. (14:46)

[ER:] My goodness, that is tremendous, because our-our 4,200 dollar worker is in the ranks of the skilled or semi-skilled workers, and um he pays a considerable amount. But four times what he pays really would mean taking out all of--all but the sheer necessities.

[William Rootes:] That is the position here today. In England, the working people only have the sheer necessities. And unfortunately, we--they cannot always obtain those necessities. For instance, food—

[ER:] Yes, I was quite struck by a report about your uh new uh-uh rations on meat, for instance. What-what is that?

[William Rootes:] It -- at the moment, it has been given at a bonus for one week: ten pence per head. But it has been normally eight pence per head, and that includes not only fresh meat but corned beef.

[ER:] Well, now what do people uh eat, because that would hardly give a family of four one meal in a whole week of meat?

[William Rootes:] If we, if I may say so, forgive me, but if we ate the same amount of meat that you eat in America, it would not give you one meal, I don't think. But in this country, they rear chicken in the backyards, they go out into the countryside and they catch a rabbit, they make up all sorts of vegetable stews -- it all reminds me of the life back in Poland before the war. All sorts of things they-they do in order to keep the household going, and to keep some form of—

[ER:] Well, someone said today, and it struck me quite forcibly, that you had to eat enough fish so that they really felt you'd shortly develop tails and fins!

[William Rootes:] Well, we're very lucky being an island race, because we have a lot of fish, and that is very lucky. But getting back to this question of taxation now, it isn't only the worker who has to bear this heavy burden. When you come up to, shall we say, a successful executive, a man who's worked and brought up a large business. It may not quite be appreciated that our income tax, which is equivalent to your federal government tax only leaves us two and a half cents in every dollar.

[ER:] Shew. That's straight through, that doesn't uh mean an exemption up to a certain amount? Two and a half cents in every dollar?

[William Rootes:] Yes. There is an exemption up to the same point as the working man, it's about that point you get two and a half cents.

[ER:] And uh no one -- am I right in saying this -- that no one, even with the larger income, can obtain more of the things that are short, like meat. Um it doesn't matter how much income you had, you couldn't obtain anymore? (18:11)

[William Rootes:] Rationing, in this country, is uh strictly adhered to, whether you're rich or whether you're poor. What is more, there have been occasions where it hasn't been possible, but in the main, our rationing program is fulfilled. If the government of this country say you're going to get eight ounces of a thing, you're going to get eight ounces. And that is very important.

[ER:] Do you find that it has developed a black market to any great extent in this country? That's one of the things that, at home, they always threaten us with when they talk about rationing, that we did have a black market. Now what happened in this country?

[William Rootes:] You know, we're all a peculiar race, because the normal Britisher, he doesn't even seek that market. You can state, as general, in this country, black markets do not exist.

[ER:] I think that's-that means you are a very law-abiding people, doesn't it?

[William Rootes:] I suppose it's our upbringing as an island race, a sea-faring nation, always disciplined.

[ER:] Yes, that must be that.

[William Rootes:] That applies to many people, like Denmark, Norway, and so forth. You'll find all those people well-disciplined because they're sea-faring nations.

[ER:] And they abide by the law; when it has to be, it has to be, and everybody goes under the same law, doesn't it?

[William Rootes:] Certainly. Most definitely.

[ER:] That really is one of the things that probably has helped you in Great Britain through this period of sacrifice, that um the sacrifice on the whole has been a pretty equal sacrifice, hasn't it?

[William Rootes:] It has been. [ER coughs] Definitely. Sometimes people think that [ER coughs] there could've been a little let up in this w-direction or that direction. But if one looks back and realizes, that if we'd not had discipline, if we'd not had equality in all classes, then I think we should've been a ground where--which communism would have fomented much faster, and to a much greater extent that it has done here.

[ER:] Well, uh I-I would agree with that. I-I always say that here uh you have done a most extraordinary thing in your equality of sacrifice.

[William Rootes:] [ER coughs] It only comes back to-to this one question that if you are law-abiding people, [ER coughs] you are content then to make sacrifices and particularly to make sacrifices when world freedom is at stake. After all, we in the United Kingdom have been a nation [ER coughs] that has sailed the high seas and planted our people, just as we have [ER coughs] our cattle all around the world, and in doing that we really have a world outlook. And that is why, I think, there is so much in common between the United States and the Great Britain today, because you are carrying these terrific responsibilities. (21:29)

[ER:] Yes, but we've only just begun. And I think your people have perhaps a better understanding than our people by and large of the world responsibility because uh for a long time you carried that alone and now we've just begun uh to carry it.

[William Rootes:] But don't you think you're learning very rapidly?

[ER:] Well, I hope we are! [ER laughs] I think there are necessary for us—

[William Rootes:] I think you're doing wonderfully well. [ER coughs]

[ER:] Well, Sir William, as an automobile manufacturer, um as an example of industry in Great Britain, what is the picture here today?

[William Rootes:] The automobile industry, when it comes down to the whole market, is in the most difficult position. If you ordered an automobile in Great Britain today, you will get delivery in 1965.

[ER:] 1965!

[William Rootes:] 1965.

[ER:] Well, that's because—

[William Rootes:] Fourteen years.

[ER:] That's because you're exporting all your automobiles.

[William Rootes:] We're doing our best to export all we can.

[ER:] Ah ha. That's very interesting. I'm sorry, but we have only a few seconds left, and so I'm coming back to this question to ask you about it, just um after we let our announcer have a word to say.

(Break 22:53-23:10)

[ER:] Now we come right back to the talk with Sir William Rootes on the subject of the economy of the United Kingdom, and we were talking about the situation where automobiles were concerned, and I wonder, Sir William, if you wouldn't go right on talking on that subject?

[William Rootes:] Well, you were asking me, Mrs. Roosevelt, about the delivery of the British car in the United Kingdom, and I explained that it was 1965 if you ordered the car today, but I did not say this, and that is if you buy an automobile in Great Britain, you pay three times its real value.

[ER:] Three times?

[William Rootes:] Three times. Because that is the price which we are paying for our goods, whether it be motor cars and wireless and television, for a tax contribution towards our rehabilitation since the war, and now our rearmament.

[ER:] My goodness, that's terrific tax for rearmament. And—

[William Rootes:] It's very big. But we're very much worse off really than that, because if we're going to pay for rearmament, or going to rearm to the extent this country intends to rearm, then we've got to

increase our production. Now there lies our big problem because we cannot produce -- or increase, rather, our production today on account of the raw material shortages. We frankly have not the raw materials to put up our civilian production. It must decline with armament. At the same time, if we are to do that, then we're going to suffer as an island race, because we, as an island race, have to import all our materials, and to import our materials, we must export in order to pay for them. So you realize that Great Britain has, in the last year or two, made tremendous recovery. We've now balanced our external world trading; we have got a surplus on our dollar trading. But the whole problem we're faced with, that if we are going to make armaments we've got to export. And that is one of the things that has always worried me in regard to the trade--our dollar trading in the United States. We recently had a dollar export convention [ER: Yes.] at East Bourne. And uh we tried to bring out there that no matter to what extent it held down our low standard of living, even if it lowered still further our living, we in this country cannot buy materials, we cannot rearm unless we export. And I coined a phrase that I'm--because I was so nervous that the American people seeing an automobile run along the--the state park avenue might think that we were taking advantage of the American manufacturer when he himself was controlling his production, that coin--phrase that I have coined was this: dollars for defense. That is true. Every dollar spent by an American on a British manufactured good means they are assisting us to play our full part in the rearmament and to develop and hold a high standard of not only armament but of a war machine in general in Western Europe.

[ER:] Yes. Well, of course, um that--that is important, I think, for the people in the United States to understand. That when they are buying things that come from Great Britain in the United States what they are really doing is to help the international rearmament situation, which is important for us to understand. [William Rootes: Yes.] We do buy a great many things. Now, for instance, I don't suppose you would realize it, but as a housewife I know that it was a great excitement really when um English biscuits uh appeared suddenly in the grocery stores not long ago -- special grocery stores not long ago--ago, and everybody was buying these tins of English biscuits. But now those are really um little things, but I suppose they are important.

[William Rootes:] I quite agree. Of course, the whole problem really is that every dollar spent by America, is really spent in the free--in the defense of the free world. (28:10)

[ER:] Yes, that, of course, is true. Well, now we have an international raw materials committee, and does that uh serve any kind of purpose to help the United Kingdom or to help the rest of the arming of the rest of the world?

[William Rootes:] Well, we--we have a representative on that committee, a very--extraordinarily good man, called Lord Knowles. [ER: Yes.] And we are looking to that committee and to him in particular to try and lay our case in front of the international materials committee, because it is the most desperate thing in England today. Our production is falling. The automobile production in this country has--is falling by about thirty four point five percent over last quarter last year.

[ER:] Because of--of lack of raw materials.

[William Rootes:] Because of lack of raw materials.

[ER:] Not because of a lack of labor?

[William Rootes:] Not at the moment because of a lack of labor. Our labor forces will be diverted onto armament. But in the main, our whole problem today is one of raw materials. We're rather like, you know-- after all-- mustn't we get-- we martially deceased on January the first, and we--we now have to stand on our own feet. And we have to stand on our own feet at a time when the rearmament and the raw

material programs are slowing us on either side. We're really having a very difficult time. We're rather like the man recovering from a long and wasting illness, who is still convalescent, but finds that he must take on not one, uh but two strenuous jobs at work. And that is why we're looking at this raw material-- [ER:] Well, of course with Marsh--the Marshall Plan aid was planned to come to an end, there was no talk of rearmament, so that you suddenly got a new thing that you had to entertain.

[William Rootes:] We have got this new burden to bear.

[ER:] New burden to bear. (30:11)

[William Rootes:] At the time, when our economic situation was on the point of recovery, and that is what so many of us fear, that we shall get a setback. And if we get a setback, it'll be the most dangerous thing. Because after all, we're the lynchpin, as it were, between the two hemispheres, between the two defense systems of European and American defenses. And we feel the link between Western Europe and the United States, should it be broken, it would not only be the breaking of that particular prob--uh-uh difficulty we're both faced with, but it will be the breaking of a whole freedom of the-of the world. We must stand together.

[ER:] I would agree with you, and I would think it most important. But there is one thing that in the United States you hear frequently asked, and I would-- I don't want to ask it of you if you feel that your time is too short to answer it, but there is in-in the United States considerable question as to why the United Kingdom holds back on the Schuman Plan because it would seem that um it was essential to have that unification of European economy and almost as though it was necessity for the United Kingdom to be a part of it. Now I know the difficulty on account of the empire as a whole, um but I wonder if you can give me some reason that the people might understand easily in the United States.

[William Rootes:] I think the real answer to that is this: that we as a British Commonwealth were built up over a great many years, we're very widely spread over the world. We have very close ties with Europe, but the Schuman Plan has come upon us overnight. It will take time [ER: Time.] for us and the Commonwealth to underst-understand its true significance, but I would like to say this: every sign that I see in this land and in Europe means we are working closer and closer together, day by day. And of course, your own action in America, through your various UN organizations, is speeding it up.

[ER:] Well, that um I-I think, I think it's understandable that it should take a longer time, but I think a great many um Americans who have felt that this was the one coup of getting a unified economy in Europe which would make for something that made sense. Um is the--it wonders a little bit why it doesn't meet with—

[William Rootes:] Don't you think sometimes that your people [William Rootes clears throat] owing to their being a little more detached from world affairs [ER: Yes.] and Europe than we being, are a little quicker on the trigger than we are? But in the long run we work fundamentally together [ER: Oh yes, I-- that was never in question.], there is no doubt at all that we in this country in every sense, in all parties politically except for the communists, in all parties we stand shoulder to shoulder with the United States.

[ER:] I don't think there's any question of that, and I think that's always been shown whenever either one of our countries really were up against it, some understanding always came out, and I have a feeling that's what's will always happen. And um I can only say that I'm very grateful to you uh, Sir William, for being on this program today, because I think it is very important that our people have increasingly an explanation of what the sacrifice in Great Britain is, and how important it is that Great Britain should not sacrifice to the point where it loses hope.

[Break 34:36-34:43]

[ER:] Most of us do not realize that the world's population of blind persons is great enough to make up a city almost as large as New York itself. In a few countries, as in the United States, healthy blind children and adults have the opportunity to be trained and educated for a useful job in life. Not only can they earn their living, but they also have homes, hobbies, community interests, and responsibilities. However, almost five million blind persons live in Asia and Africa, and most of them still live by begging in the streets and outside temples. UNESCO has been trying to find the best way that these men and women could begin to be educated to lead useful lives. It was interesting to me to know that the head of this program for UNESCO was a New Zealander, named Sir Clutha Mackenzie, who's-who was totally blinded himself during the Gallipoli campaign of World War One. Since that time, he has devoted himself unselfishly to the problems of the blind, and is considered a world expert. A few weeks ago in Beirut, delegates from eleven Asiatic and African countries met with Sir Clutha at a UNESCO conference and agreed between them that there will be a single Braille system for all their countries. Seven of the eleven delegates were themselves blind. In agreeing to the single script, many of these leaders must sacrifice what they have learned over periods of many years and begin all over again. One example was S. T. Dajani, principal for the School of the Blind in Ramala, Hashemite Jordan, who volunteered to scrap twelve years of hard work in order to help world unity.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] This is Elliott Roosevelt speaking and reminding you that you have been listening to *The Eleanor Roosevelt Program*, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time. Today's program was recorded in London, and we wish to thank the BBC for making their facilities available to us.

Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)
File(s): 72-30 (155)

Transcription: Anna Karditzas
First Edit: Tom Schneider
Final Edit: Seth LaShier