

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

April 11, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about how countries are accepted into NATO. In the interview segment, ER discusses refugees behind the Iron Curtain with David Martin, executive secretary of the International Rescue Committee.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, David Martin

[ER:] How do you do? This Eleanor Roosevelt. Every Monday through Friday, my son Elliott and I have the opportunity to visit with you here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. Each day it is our desire to bring interesting guests that we are hopeful you will enjoy meeting. Elliott, will you tell our listeners today's plans?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, Mother. The subject of today's program is not a happy one. The story of men leaving home and families and escaping Stalinist dominated areas, but there is a satisfaction in knowing that men like Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today, Mr. David Martin, are making it their responsibility to provide that refuge and even a new beginning for as many of these escapees as they can. You'll hear Mr. Martin's story after Mother and I have gone over a letter recently received in the mail and that will follow a message from the sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

[Break 1:11-1:29]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] A uh Mrs. Eisner of Atlantic City, New Jersey, has clipped out an article that appeared in the New York Times headlined "Eisenhower's first problems are diplomatic not military;" the subheads are "Spain's participation, Balkan defense, quest for air bases, top the issues that face him." Mrs. Eisner says that the article mentions that we must remember the North Atlantic Treaty as conceived as a defensive alliance of democratic powers. How then she wants to know are either Spain or Yugoslavia eligible? And what are some of the other diplomatic rather than military problems General Eisenhower will have to face?

[ER:] Well, of course, I have no idea. Um I um I imagine that as a military man he is looking for the areas of Europe which he may have to defend and we will know that at the present time Yugoslavia is watching her border with care because on the other side the USSR satellites are massing. Now um I think we have to get over the idea um that we are opposed to communism, we are opposed to living in the same world with communism because we're going to have to live in the same world as communism in many places. When we examine into it, what we are opposed to is the type of police state and um government that enslaves its people. Um and--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, aren't we also fundamentally opposed to the type of communism that says we've got to beat down the whole world [ER: Exactly we are not--] and control the whole world and we're going to let any other kind of government live.

[ER:] Exactly, that is the kind of communism we are most opposed to. We are not opposed to their having a um a form of government or a form of economy within their own uh countries that is different from ours. Um we don't say that your economy has to be like the economy of the USA, or you have to run your government that way. Um what we say is we don't want uh you trying to infiltrate into our country and change our government against our will, and um I-I think that we have to approach Yugoslavia with these

things in mind. Um if the defense of the Balkans um is part of General Eisenhower's concern it's because he thinks that the Balkans are an important part of Europe to keep at peace if possible, and um as far as Spain is concerned I don't think it's completely a diplomatic concern either because [Elliott Roosevelt: That's -- Really and truly that is completely a military that is a military concern.] -- military concern, and he, General Eisenhower, has not made the decision that we will send an ambassador back to Spain. That was made [ER coughs] by our government. And um his concern is whether Spain is a good place um for the Atlantic Pact countries to cooperate with.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, not only that but uh it's been stated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on uh--or their representatives on numerous occasions that what uh we are most concerned with is in having uh trained troops that will fight under his command which are represented both in uh in uh Yugoslavia and in Spain. In addition to that Spain, time and again, has been stated to be an ideal spot for air bases from which we can uh fly our strategic uh air craft against any invasion by the enemy of Western Europe. Uh I think that uh that this is not a question of democratic powers; this is a coalition of all powers that are opposed to aggression on the part of the Soviet Union or its satellites. (6:15)

[ER:] I think that's about what it um, it amounts to [ER coughs] I don't um--I'm far from approving dictatorship governments and um I-I would not like um to live in a dictatorship and um I would not like to uh have close affiliations um and be dependent on any dictatorship, but I don't think uh we can dictate to the rest of the world what they will have within their borders. I think the thing we are concerned with is what they do outside[Elliott Roosevelt: That's correct.] and what they attempt to in the world as a whole.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I think that uh the latter part uh which you uh stated that you didn't know how to answer it, I think I can state that from the newspapers I gather that General Eisenhower has some rather heavy diplomatic responsibilities. First of all, he must get uh all of the western European nations into the mood of cooperating in the building up of the strongest possible unified force. Uh for instance, uh in um Holland there happens to be a socialist form of government and the socialist prime minister of Holland is much more interested in spending the limited budget of the government of Holland on their social activities. The building of new uh housing projects, the building of new industrial plants of a socialist nature, uh he's not in--at all in favor of building up a huge standing army which will operate in--with the other North Atlantic Pact nations, so that General Eisenhower's job was to sell the prime minister on Holland participating to their proportionate share. And that's just one of the countries, that he has to do it with all of them and uh. It also is a question of dealing with rather ticklish phases of welding together an army, for instance, the Spanish people uh under the leadership of Franco's government are very antagonistic to the French government; the French government is also antagonistic to Generalissimo Franco. And yet he has to have the troops of both nations -- if he's going to use Spanish troops at all -- cooperating and working together. And I would say that that is a very heavy diplomatic problem.

[ER:] Now [ER laughs] I have no response to you. [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh but I'd like to ask you, do you happen to know whether uh general Eisenhower scope of his command covers the entire Mediterranean are and the uh area of the Middle East?

[ER:] I wouldn't think it covered the Middle East, I thought it covered simply the Atlantic Pact area. They do not have at present Middle East members that I know of.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, what will happen in the event that Soviet Union uh through peaceful or other means decides to move down and grab all of Iran and move to the Red Sea and take over American and British oil interests in the Middle East.

[ER:] I have not heard any uh discussion of that uh problem as yet so I don't know. I should think it was quite obvious that we would dislike that extremely. (9:56)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And in all likelihood uh would not the command uh naturally fall under the uh the-the overall supreme commander for that whole area, the European area.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] I should think so-I should-I should think so. Without any question [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] Um I-I think that one very interesting thing is the evaluation of what the Soviets knew moves me um and what she is likely to suggest in this next um plenipotentiary conference--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Do have any hopes that anything of uh any progress will ever be made uh as long as the present group in the Politburo in Moscow are in control?

[ER:] I don't, but I think that they may make it um very uncomfortable because I would not be at all surprised to find um an apparent peace offer to withdraw um [Elliott Roosevelt: From eastern Germany] from--no; uh for all of us to withdraw from Germany as a whole, and let Germany have a unified um secret election. Um and that would sound awfully [Elliott Roosevelt cough] good to great many people and yet what it would really mean would be that in withdrawing, USSR would leave a trained army [Elliott Roosevelt: And secret police force.] and secret police force in East Germany that could easily take over West Germany, and um it would actually mean that they could easily control Germany by indirect means in that way and get the rest of us out and have Germany on their side [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] without any war at all. And it will look to everybody here, lest we fall for this, as though we were trying to build up um a war [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.], whereas they will be offering peace and uh that's going to be awfully hard, we're only going to have to be terribly on the alert to see what lies behind whatever they offer.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I think that that answers the question from Mrs. Eisner of Atlantic City, New Jersey, and I think now we must turn the program over to our announcer.

[Break 12:43 -12:58]

[ER:] From time to time on my program there have been guests who are connected with the organizations which help the destitute peoples of the world. Today Mr. David Martin, executive secretary to the International Rescue Committee, will tell us of the work being done by the committee to aid the refugees of Europe who have the courage to escape from behind the Iron Curtain. I'm happy to introduce to you, Mr. Martin.

[David Martin:] I'm very happy to be with you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] It's a great pleasure to have you because I've been very much interested in the work that you're doing. Now, before and during the war, Mr. Martin, the International Rescue Committee was instrumental in rescuing thousands of anti-Nazi refugees wasn't it?

[David Martin:] Yes, it was.

[ER:] Well, I understand that your chief concern at the present time is with the plight of the refugees who have escaped and still are escaping from behind the Iron Curtain.

[David Martin:] Yes, the nature of the refugee problem has changed in that respect. Instead of fleeing from a black terror, people today are fleeing from the red terror. But um many of the refugees we are assisting are-are refugees for the second time. Having fled from the Nazis, having returned to their countries after the war, they are now compelled to give up everything they possess for the second time and seek refuge in the democratic West. (14:25)

[ER:] That's a terrible experience isn't it? Well going back to the root of the problem, why would you say people become refugees?

[David Martin:] Well now, it's something perhaps that the average American fails to realize -- the word refugees is bandied about so much uh that the-the average man thinks of the refugee as a homeless person nothing further. Behind that word however there-there is a tremendous drama in each individual instance. After all, it's no small thing, Mrs. Roosevelt, to have to give up your home, your loved ones, your family, everything you ever possessed, and flee to some completely foreign country.

[ER:] Well, of course, there must be some terrible motivating fear that makes you do a thing like that.

[David Martin:] There is, I-I should say that many instances the-the fear of the regime is infinitely greater than the fear of death because the fact is many risked their lives to get out. Specifically, I should say the people who escape fear imprisonment because they have expressed views in opposition to the regime, fear deportation to Siberia, or else their hatred of the regime is so great that even though they have-they are not expecting momentary arrest they escape because they can't tolerate it a moment longer.

[ER:] Well, it must be a terrible thing, particularly to leave your loved ones behind because that must be held over your head, isn't it very often?

[David Martin:] That is held over their head, and I know through what agony the refugees go, those refugees who have had to escape and leave their children behind, their children, and you can't even communicate with them openly, but have to do so through third parties.

[ER:] That must be a terrible thing because of course um children uh are really helpless; they've left them to uh to be used really by the regime. [David Martin: Quite.] My, well what kind of people are these refugees?

[David Martin:] Well, I should say that they come from all walks of life and from all creeds, Mrs. Roosevelt. They communists don't distinguish between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Either you're for the regime or you're against. Uh--

[ER:] Well, is there any one group that is more strongly represented than any other group, by I mean, is it an intellectual or a workers group. What are--is there any difference? (17:07)

[David Martin:] Well, that-that's very much a question that is very much to the point. There are some ordinary workers and peasants, quite a few of them among the refugees. But there's a tremendous concentration of people who, were once upon a time, leaders of community in some capacity. Trade unions leaders, religious leaders, businessmen, um university professors. Uh these people by virtue of their position were not given the alternative that the ordinary farmer has. The ordinary farmer, if he wishes to keep his mouth shut, can stay alive no matter how much he hates the regime, but if you were a university professor the only choice open to you is supporting the regime actively, travelling to Siberia one way, or else making your way across the frontier, so that there is a tremendous concentration of these former leaders of community among the Iron Curtain refugees.

[ER:] In what countries are these Iron Curtain refugees um chiefly concentrated today?

[David Martin:] I should say Germany, probably has the greatest number uh France probably ranks next, and Austria next, and all told the total number of escapees since the end of the war -- I'm not talking about DPs -- these are people who have made their way across the Iron Curtain is in excess of three hundred thousand.

[ER:] My, that's a good many people isn't it?

[David Martin:] It's a tremendous number of people. [ER: Yes I don't think people--] When you consider, Mrs. Roosevelt, how many try to get out who don't get out.

[ER:] Well, are-are many-are many caught as they try to get out?

[David Martin:] Yes, it varies from frontier to frontier; some frontiers are more difficult than others. On the Turkish frontier they estimate that eight to nine out of ten attempting to escape are shot down.

[ER:] Really? Oh--

[David Martin:] That is generally credited by our Turkish office. In Germany uh and Austria uh the chances of getting out are much better. From Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, I should say they still have one chance in two of making it to safety.

[ER:] Well, are the refugees still coming out from behind the Iron Curtain today?

[David Martin:] Despite the border controls they're still coming out and uh I should say that a reasonable estimate of the rate of flow would be about one thousand a week uh some weeks six hundred, eight hundred a week, other weeks.

[ER:] Well, Mayor [Ernst] Reuter told me that in West Berlin they counted uh they got about two hundred a week. [ER coughs]

[David Martin:] Yes, well that of course is a special case how often including the Germany east zone refugees who really are refugees from behind the Iron Curtain, including their number the total number of escapees would go up past the one million mark.

[ER:] It would really?

[David Martin:] Oh yes, at least a million.

[ER:] Oh my, that's-that is a tremendous thing, you mean from East Germany you have that number of refugees who come across. (20:30)

[David Martin:] Yes, because they come across not merely to Berlin-Berlin, they come across the entire frontier.

[ER and David Martin overlap]

[ER:] Oh yes. they come across the whole area.

[David Martin:] I should say the rate of flow from East Germany as a whole has been at least a thousand a week over the past several years, [ER: Good Gracious!] possibly much more than that.

[ER:] That is astounding. Um well now, I've heard a good deal about the precautions being taken by the communist states to prevent defectors, has escaping now become more dangerous day by day?

[David Martin:] Oh, I should say with every day much more dangerous. They've been doing their utmost to fortify the frontiers and protect them with barbed wire and electric wire entanglements. And ah they're very anxious to prevent people from getting out from behind the Iron Curtain, but despite that, despite every precaution they've taken. Despite the fact that there's hardly-hardly one hundred yards of the frontier that is not guarded or protected in some way, the people are still coming out. I think that gives you some indication of the terrible motivating fear that impels these people to come.

[ER:] Yes, it seems incredible that-that um they can still get out because um they must have to destroy barbed wire, they must have to um plan with great care and really in a way they must have connivance very often.

[David Martin:] Very often they must have assistance either from friends or, for that matter, from other people in the regime itself who are not always communists.

[ER:] Yes, they probably are-are um weakness within the regime itself that makes such a thing possible, otherwise it would be almost impossible--

[David Martin:] I should say very great weaknesses within these regimes, much greater than is ordinarily realized here.

[ER:] Well, whenever you have a police state, of course, it is extremely difficult for people to revolt, I mean they can't openly resist without risking being shot, and therefore I suppose it is perfectly natural that there would be a great many people within the regime who would not have the courage actually to come out but who would have um if could be made plausible um the courage to allow others uh to just to get by if it could be done without any real danger on their part.

[David Martin:] About that, there's no doubt at all, Mrs. Roosevelt. Even in the ranks of Red Army, among the Red Army officers, there are many who are prepared to assist others to escape. Though they cannot escape themselves. (23:35)

[ER:] That is-that is really an astounding thing because uh I think that must be uh, a very disturbing to the Politburo and the Kremlin itself.

[David Martin:] I have no doubt at all about it that's why they're chopping off so many heads at the present time in central Europe.

[ER:] It seems to me that what's been going on in Czechoslovakia in the last week or so um must give them pause because it looks as though some of their top people were being held in protective custody, what they call protective custody.

[David Martin:] Yes, oh yes, it's not very protective I assure you, [ER: No.] [ER and David Martin laugh] but um that--that--that situation that I should say is general through-throughout the satellite countries and in the Soviet Union itself. There is vast discontent.

[ER:] Well, that is very encouraging. For just a minute now we have to pause and let our announcer have a word to say.

[Break 24:28- 24:42]

[ER:] Now we come back to our interview with Mr. David Martin and I'm full of questions. First of all, I want to know how these refugees live when they come out. What happens to them? [David Martin: Well--] They can't have anything with them.

[David Martin:] I'm afraid I can--No, they-they bring anything but the shirts on their back, Mrs. Roosevelt, and I wish I could give you a happier answer. Ah you see the International Refugee Organization is going out of existence this year and its been winding up operations over the past year and a half. Now the exodus from the Iron Curtain countries really set in only three years ago after the communists seized power in Czechoslovakia. That was February '48. IRO was able to accommodate a um substantial percentage of the new escapees up until October of last year. Since October of last year, none, not a single one of the people who have escaped, that is the people who have escaped since that time have been able to get IRO maintenance, and uh they live from hand-to-mouth, they live as best they can on the German economy there unemployment in Germany of course, there's unemployment in France. It's more difficult for them as foreigners to find-to find jobs of any kind. Uh I should say generally, there has been so little done for this group of new refugees that there is a great bitterness and disillusionment among them. They have risked their lives, after all, to come to our side and when they come over here, while they don't expect to be given four room apartments, they expect to be treated like human beings, and they discover that they're not treated like human beings; the western world apparently doesn't care. They don't ask for very much, even a small token of uh sympathy or recognition from the western world means a tremendous amount to them.

For example, we've got many many letters from refugees who we haven't been able to help in a big way, we've just sent them a food package and they reply in writing saying that this is the first act of generosity they have received from the Western World since escaping one year ago and now they can believe again that God exists.

[ER:] Well, I don't think it's a case of God existing, I think it's a case of a little human kindness and appreciation [ER and David Martin chuckles] [David Martin: Well, I'll go along with you there.] for what has happened to them, but is anything being done on the international scale to help these latest of our refugees?

[David Martin:] Um, I'm afraid nothing. You see when the IRO winds up its office will be to--its function will be taken over by the High Commissioner's Office for Refugees and this-this office will not have any funds for material aid, and so the entire problem devolves really upon the sympathy and understanding of the American people. We're the only people in the world who have the means to share with our less fortunate fellow human beings in Europe. (27:54)

[ER:] Well, uh is nothing being done by any of the other countries?

[David Martin:] Countries? Well, the Germans don't turn them back, the French do not turn them back, the Turks do not turn them back. To that extent they must be given credit, they respect the right of asylum. But they're poor countries, and-and they have so-so many problems of their own what with rearmament and world troubles.

[ER:] Aren't there any other countries in this hemisphere that could help a little because there are countries that are not fully developed and these people have skills that would be very valuable in those countries.

[David Martin:] Ah yes, the South American countries have been accepting a large number of refugees as well as DPs, but generally speaking the demand has been uh for farm laborers and for--

[ER:] Not for-not for the people uh professional people and that sort of thing?

[David Martin:] No, there's been a very limited demand for-for them, and uh a year ago, a year and a half ago, the IRO convened a number of emergency conferences with a view to exploring what could be done to resettle these unwanted intellectuals and professionals. That is a project in which we are concentrating at the present time. Mind you, in attempting to resettle these people, Mrs. Roosevelt, uh we can't always do as much as we want to because of certain difficulties that are placed in our way. For example, at the present time we have the Internal Security Act, the immigration provisions of it. And uh--

[ER:] That's in the United States?

[David Martin:] That's in the United States, yes.

[ER:] That's why I asked about the other countries, because I knew that for the moment we were laboring under disabilities, so to speak.

[David Martin:] Yes, rather grievous disabilities. I don't think that people in Washington realize the full implications of the act they've written into the books, for that matter I should say that it's as much a matter of interpretation on the part of the Attorney General's office as of the act itself. Um with your assistance, Mrs. Roosevelt, I should like to place before at least a portion of the American public, the problem as we see it [ER: Yes] as an organization dealing with these escapees from behind the Iron Curtain. Now under the Internal Security Act, people who were nominally members of fascist or communist organizations, or employees, are forever barred from admission to this country. Now, that doesn't mean that you had to be a member of the Nazi Party or the Communist Party, if you were a member of the Hitlerjugend, the Hitler Youth, you are barred, if you were a member of the Young Pioneers, the communist children's organization, you are barred. (31:06)

[ER:] Well, I've come-up against a number of cases of that kind, where people in order to live, had had to accept membership in some of these organizations to be able to work.

[David Martin:] Very obviously, and that, of course, applies to organizations that were, in a sense, communist, but then you have people, like university professors, who were never communists, who were persecuted by the communist regime but were employed by the communist state. Now under a rigid interpretation of the act, and unfortunately it tends to be rather rigid, an anti-communist professor who has escaped from the Soviet Union or from Czechoslovakia -- [ER: Is still a communist.] Well, he is a former employee of a communist state and therefore ineligible for admission. A Czechoslovak army officer who took two months to escape after the Communists seized power, for that period of time would have been guilty of being an employee of a communist state, and therefore ineligible for admission.

[ER:] I-I can see what a difficult uh thing we do against these people, it's a very difficult thing, and yet I can also-I also know the difficulties of our own people because once an act is passed, the Attorney General has got to have a good deal of courage because he may be called in by Congress, and they may say, "You are not doing what we told you to do." [ER chuckles]

[David Martin:] Well, there-there I agree; the complications in Washington are infinite.

[ER:] Well, I--the only thing that troubles me is that, of course, I think we could derive a great deal of value from many of this intellectual group, as well as from the labor group, and um not to use common sense because, aside from anything else, they can tell us and interpret for us what actually the Soviet regime is in a way that none of us know it.[David Martin: Precisely.] And so, in many ways they are very valuable as uh sources of information.

[David Martin:] Yes, I should say that from a national security standpoint, Mrs. Roosevelt, they have information which would be absolutely priceless to us; information and specialized knowledge and an ability to understand the machinations of the communist mentality. I think I can take the liberty of saying that I've discussed this matter with a number of people who occupy high positions in our armed forces, and generally they are disturbed at the serious obstacles being placed in the way of recruiting refugee specialists, refugee officers, who are essential really to our military and political intelligence, [ER: Yes.] our knowledge of what is going on in these countries. (34:05)

[ER:] Well, that's what I--what troubled me very much. Now I understand that the International Rescue Committee is currently conducting an Iron Curtain refugee campaign under the chairmanship of General Carl Spaatz, who must know what he's about, the former Chief of the US Air Force. So could you tell our audience briefly how you plan to help these refugees through this campaign?

[David Martin:] Yes, I um very briefly I would say that our program is two-fold. First of all, on a large scale, we want to bring assistance of some kind: clothing, a food package, a few food packages to all the refugees who have escaped or to the great majority of them, merely to give them the feeling that the western world hasn't forgotten them all-together. Secondly, since we can't resettle all of them, it's-it's beyond our means it's-it's just impossible, we are planning to resettle over the coming year several thousand of those who have suffered the most and who are the most important to the democratic world from a-a national security standpoint.

[ER:] Well now, if people want to help you, where do they get in touch with you?

[David Martin:] Well, they can write to General Carl Spaatz, Chairman, Inter-Iron Curtain Refugee Campaign, 62 West Forty-Fifth, New York. Ah may I repeat the address, Mrs. Roosevelt?

[ER:] Yes, you may.

[David Martin:] 62 West Forty-Fifth Street, New York City

[ER:] Now, anyone of us who feels this is important can write there and ask you how they can help, is that right?

[David Martin:] That's exact, Mrs. Roosevelt

[ER:] Well, thank you very much, I'm sorry that our time has come to an end because I could ask you many more questions, but I'm--have to say thank you for being with me today.

[David Martin:] And I was very very happy to be with you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Thank you. (36:10)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Here's a message of importance to every American: can you picture seven million youngsters in your mind's eye? Probably not, that's a pretty big order, but that's how many more children'll be in our elementary schools by 1956. Yes, there'll be seven million more lively boys and girls

entering American classrooms to be molded into good citizens. Remember, good citizens of tomorrow are molded in the classroom. Better schools make for a better America. Good citizens everywhere are helping, for freedom is everybody's job.

And now it's time to close the program and to remind you that you've been listening to *The Eleanor Roosevelt Program*, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time, and this is Elliott Roosevelt speaking and wishing you all good day. (37:15)

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