

## THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1948 (catalog date)

Description: In this segment, ER discusses the situation in Germany following WWII and how to maintain peaceful US/German relations.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt

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[ER] Thank you, Anna. One thing which I've given a good deal of thought to and which many Americans have asked me about is the attitude of the Germans today, especially towards America. Are they bitter over their defeat? Are they sorry Hitler was killed? Well, I think I can answer those questions, at least to some extent, as I've had the chance of visiting the Germany twice since the end of the war in Europe, once only recently. On my first trip to Germany, following the war in 1946, the feeling was still so bitter and the fighting so recent that the army did not exactly advertise my trip, though I met with the press and talked freely with such Germans as I came across. Recently, I was able to visit Germany again, and it seemed to me that already there was a marked change in the attitude of the people. I was invited to Germany by the women doctors of Stuttgart, and spoke to them at a public meeting in that city. Although they seemed for the most part friendly and interested and my speech seemed to be well received, the Germans still do not seem universally to accept guilt for the war or for allowing Hitler to come to power. The attitude of some of them seems to be that if we had helped Germany more in the first place when they were a democracy or a republic, there would have been no Hitler, although I must say that seems like rather strange reasoning to me. However, some of the Germans are now beginning to face the situation and the ruin around them, and to try to start building a new life and a new country under very trying conditions.

I think that one reason the Germans are becoming more friendly toward America is that they have come to think of us as their bulwark against the USSR. I noticed in talking with many Germans that those who have come in contact with USSR occupation forces are both bitter and afraid, and look to us to save them from being swallowed up by the Soviet Union. The airlift to Berlin is another thing that has done much to win German friendship for America. However, I have the feeling that there still exists a good deal of bitterness among the people in Germany, and that the hopes of better relations between our countries in the future lies with the youth of both Germany and America. What set me to thinking about this is a very interesting letter I had from a German boy named Armand Myer. The letter, written in English, said in part: "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, I don't want to overburden you with useless work, but I have to write to you. I cannot stop my mind and perhaps you will read these lines coming from a young nineteen years old German pupil. I've heard your speech you made at Stuttgart on the radio. This is the first time in history the victor comes to the conquered people and makes a speech in his language. That gives me reason to believe in a free democracy. We have discussed your speech at school and we all were quite happy. We forgot the mode of knock down and we all had the feeling that the ice was melted. A lot of the pupils of our class, including myself, are going and writing letters to the pupils of the Lincoln High School in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, to get an idea of the life over there in the new world. We read in their letters a lot of democratic ideas, but we couldn't believe it. May you allow me to put a question? Politicians are invited to America, could it be possible to invite only a few pupils of the American zone for a short time only? Then these can tell all the youth in the US zone what they've seen as an eyewitness in the land in which democracy is the daily bread of citizens. Sincerely, Armand Myer."

That letter from a German boy gave me food for thought. He might not have been uh absolutely sincere, but it made me realize again how hard it is for us to understand the feelings of young people who have been raised with nothing but contempt for the democratic countries and with no knowledge or understanding of what life in America is like. The point this young German boy raises of bringing

German students to America is a very good one, in my opinion, and is one I've already talked over with several heads of American colleges. It is already being done in Paris. I don't know what will come of it, but I do feel sure that one of the very best means of cultivating understanding between our two countries is for us to bring German students to America, and to send some of our young people to Germany in the future. Perhaps in that way, the younger people will be able to arrive at an understanding of democracy which has proved so difficult for them in the past. And now, back to my daughter, Anna, in Hollywood.

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