

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

March 9th, 1949 (catalog date)

Description: In Hollywood, ER and Anna Roosevelt talk about the ethical obligations of news reporters and the slanting of news against certain races and ethnicities. Later in the episode, Anna Roosevelt and ER award Mrs. C.K. Allen, wife of the superintendent of Rhodes House at Oxford University, as Woman of the Day.

Participants: ER, Anna Roosevelt, John Nelson

[John Nelson:] The American Broadcasting Company presents Eleanor and Anna Roosevelt. First here is Anna Roosevelt.

[Anna Roosevelt:] Good afternoon and thank you John Nelson. John, I think Mother is sort of spoiling us by being with us here in Hollywood. It's too much fun.

[John Nelson:] I certainly agree with you Anna.

[ER:] Well you're both very nice, and I'm enjoying it too. And of course it's wonderful for me to have two days with my three children who live here and with my eight grandchildren, but then you don't get to know grandchildren in these few minutes and I'm looking forward to a real visit from them some time at Hyde Park.

[Anna Roosevelt:] Well I know they are too Mother. Mother, there's a serious subject I want very much to talk with you about today. It's something I'd like to get your ideas and opinions on because you've always been so active in fighting intolerance. In a few days, the Federal Communications Commission is beginning a hearing here in Los Angeles into charges that a man named G.A. Richards ordered newscasters at his station KMPC in Los Angeles to slant or distort the news against certain individuals and racial and religious groups. The case has far reaching implications because Mr. Richards owns three fifty-thousand watt stations: KMPC Los Angeles, WJR Detroit and WGAR Cleveland. These stations reach millions of people and the licenses of Mr. Richards's stations can be revoked if it's proved that he has not used the public radio channels in the public interest, convenience or necessity as required by law.

[ER:] Well it seems to me, Anna, that a man has an entire right to hold any opinions personally and express them, but I think he should make it clear that they are his own views. Now when it comes to having a policy on a radio station of slanting news against racial or religious groups --that seems to me a serious matter. It takes you into the realm of international situations, for our government, in signing the charter of the United Nations, pledged itself as a government not to do any of these things. Now the radio in our country is not government owned, but it seems to me that when a government has undertaken certain international obligations, the owners of radio stations must carefully consider when they go against these government policies. In addition at the present time, one of the best propac-propaganda items that the communists use against us is that our press and radio warmonger and incite to war by attacks of a religious or racial nature, so that when a radio station undertakes deliberately to slant its news against racial or religious groups it is playing into the hands of the communists and giving them a basis for attacks upon the United States. (3:30)

[Anna Roosevelt:] And Mother, as you know these charges were brought by the American Jewish Congress and the Radio News Club of Hollywood, an organization of some seventy southern California

newscasters. The Radio News Club filed a complaint with the FCC stating that Mr. Richards gave instructions to his KMPC news staff to slant, distort, suppress and alter news to promote his private views. The club has also filed with the FCC memoranda and letters in Richards' handwriting and sworn statements giving details of the charges against him. George Lewin, former KMPC news manager, told the FCC in a signed statement that Richards instructed him to seek items derogatory to the Truman administration, to plug for General MacArthur and Thomas Dewey in newscasts, to in Richards own words "keep hammering at the Jews who are all communists," to emphasize charges against David Lilienthal and to suppress anything favorable to him and to stop broadcasting stories about Palestine. KMPC's former director of news and special events Clete Roberts said in a sworn statement to the FCC, that Richards instructed him to seek out stories unfavorable to the Jews and to link Jews with communism. Roberts also said that Richards wrote him a letter about New Dealers in which he said "beat them to the punch; accuse them of everything under the sun." The American Jewish Congress filed with the FCC information that another KMPC writer, Maurice Sterrels, was directed by Richards to emphasize that the murdered gangster Bugsy Sie-Siegel was Jewish, to stress David Lilienthal's religion and foreign extraction, and to play up the scandal involving General Bennett Myers in such a way as to make Myers appear Jewish, although actually he is not. One newscaster even signed an affidavit that when you fell asleep while driving and were involved in an accident, Mr. Richards telephoned him and asked if it wasn't possible to imply that you had not fallen asleep but that you were intoxicated.

[ER:] I think if Mr. Richards had tried to say that I was intoxicated at the time of my accident, he would have been laughed at by most of the people in the country. It is very widely known, I find, that I'm an advocate of great moderation and that I rarely take anything to drink. It is so well known that I find people hesitant about offering drinks, for fear that I will object to others drinking while I am there. Of course I'm not concerned about attacks on me personally. As a policy, personal attack has always seemed to me stupid, but an individual in public life has to be prepared for this type of stupidity. And even family and friends have to suffer from it, even little dogs. [Anna Roosevelt laughs] It is quite different, however when you attack a whole race, either on the basis of nationality or religious belief. That is not only stupid but can be very harmful. (7:00)

[Anna Roosevelt:] I heartily agree Mother. And the most shocking thing is that Mr. Richards admits the charges are true. He makes these admissions as part of his petition presented to the FCC by his lawyers, who include by the way, former Senator Burton K. Wheeler. The petition acknowledges that Richards ordered his newscasters to distort the news, but says Richards won't do it in the future. It points out that Mr. Richards has been ill for eleven years, and that his health and confinement have made him impatient and impulsive. Furtherer it admits the genuineness of documents signed by Richards and now in the possession of the FCC, but explains that Richards' personal familiarity with his employees caused him to use language which to strangers would sound incriminating. Here's the kind of language which Mr. Richards used to newscaster William Parnell on one occasion, according to a sworn statement filed with the FCC by Parnell: [John Nelson reads: "I own this station lock, stock, and barrel and that's the way it's going to be. Now the kikes and communists and union racketeers are screaming their heads off for ridiculous wages trying to ruin good Americans. Why Washington is full of Jews and niggers running the government. Unless you're a Jew you can't even get a government job now."] That is a sample of Mr. Richards's opinions and of the way he talked to his employees in ordering them to distort the news. Now however, Mr. Richards says he's turned over a new leaf and will be a good boy in the future. He has started a campaign to put on a new and pure front. He's hired a former vice president of the National Broadcasting Company, Frank Mullen, and turned over operational control of the three stations to him, although retaining his majority interest in the stations. The stations have also been publishing full page ads in trade journals loudly proclaiming their Americanism and calling attention to the extremely ironic fact that they are known as the goodwill stations. (9:10)

[ER:] Well Anna, it seems to me that no one who willfully promotes racial and religious prejudice on the air should keep the name of goodwill, since that is undermining goodwill in every possible way. I know that in a court of law the plea of guilty and the pledge not to commit wrong in the future does not do away with the punishment prescribed under the law. The other day I read of a man who was sentenced to prison for stealing a small sum of money to support his invalid wife. The judge was sympathetic but under the law, could do nothing but sentence the man to prison. Anyone who stirs up racial or religious hatred and does not present news straightforwardly is not giving the citizens of the United States a chance to make up their own minds on questions, and is thus striking at the very roots of our traditions and of our democracy. We have seen all too often how those who preach hatred ignite the flames of bloodshed and warfare. The so-called Mayflower Decision of the Federal Communication Commission says on this point:

[John Nelson reads:] "Radio can serve as an instrument of democracy only when devoted to the communication of information and the exchange of ideas fairly and objectively presented. As one licensed to operate in the public domain, a licensee has assumed the obligation of presenting all sides -- [recording fails and skips]"

[ER:] --and above the whims and caprices of individuals who own stations. And I feel the same way about any medium which assumes the responsibility of passing news along to the public. I think that as a whole, radio has done a good job of living up to the standards of practice of the National Association of Broadcasters, which says American broadcasting is a living symbol of democracy. Its broadcasters' creed is a pledge to respect the rights and sensitivities of all people and to protect and uphold the dignity and brotherhood of all mankind. (11:44)

[Anna Roosevelt:] Mother I agree with you that radio as a whole has done a good job of fairly and factually presenting the news. That's why I think it's so tremendously important that when intolerance does appear on our American airwaves that it be stamped out quickly and decisively. There is most certainly no place for racial or religious intolerance on the air in the United States.

[John Nelson:] That was a most vital discussion Mrs. Roosevelt and Anna, and now Anna, whom have you and your mother chosen as our Woman of the Day?

[Anna Roosevelt:] She's a British woman, Mrs. C. K. Allen, wife of the superintendent of Rhodes House at Oxford, England which accommodates Rhodes scholars. Because of the housing shortage the trustees were compelled to demand that married scholars from all parts of the world first find accommodation for the-for their families before bringing them to England. But Mrs. Allen came to the rescue and as a result more than eighty young families have found places to live while continuing their important studies. Because of Mrs. C. K. Allen's untiring and useful efforts, Mother and I have chosen her our Woman of the Day. She will receive a valuable and appropriately inscribed remembrance of this tribute and a subscription to the Woman magazine which I edit. In the current issue of the magazine by the way, there's another interesting article of the series that deals with American women as breadwinners. It's entitled "Housekeeper for Six Thousand" and I'm sure you'll find it as absorbing as I did. The pocket-sized current issue of *The Woman* magazine is now at your newsstand. And now, it's time to say good afternoon with this thought for the day by St. Simon: "The golden age is before us, not behind us."

[John Nelson:] Listen everyday Monday through Friday for Eleanor and Anna Roosevelt over most of these ABC stations. Your announcer is John Nelson. This program is a Masterson, Ready and Nelson production. Now a listening reminder: listen to the great new Bing Crosby show tonight on ABC. This is ABC, the American Broadcasting Company.

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note: all names except William Parnell have been verified (CR)

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project