

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

May 22, 1951

Description: In Geneva, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss the state of Great Britain's economy. In the following segment, ER interviews Dr. Charles Malik, the new chair of the United Nations Human Rights Condition.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Dr. Charles Malik, Dee Tucker, Mr. Filio (of Swissair)

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

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Today, Mrs. Roosevelt's guest is Dr. Charles Malik, delegate from Lebanon to the United Nations, and also the new chairman of the Human Rights Commission. You've all heard Dr. Malik before from Lake Success, but today the interview is the first of a series we have been recording here in Geneva, where as you know the Human Rights Committee has been meeting. The series is being flown back to the United States by Swissair in time for these broadcasts. Mrs. Roosevelt will introduce Dr. Malik a little later on. Now, however, we're going to have a message from our sponsors who make this recorded program possible, and then a special discussion we hope you'll enjoy.

[Break 1:00 - 1:07]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, in the many talks you've had with officials in Great Britain, how does their inflation compare with that of the United States? And do you consider that their very bad plight is actually born of necessity? Could any of it have been avoided? And also then, I'd like to follow it up with another question about Switzerland, because now that we have been to England and are back here in Switzerland again, I'd like to ask you uh whether they have inflation in Switzerland.

[ER:] My goodness, you're going awfully quickly. I—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I'm going to cover a whole big field in this ten [Unclear term]. [ER chuckles]

[ER:] Well, I wouldn't have said that Great Britain had inflation in the same way that we have, because Great Britain still has rationing. And if you have rationing of course you sometimes ration by letting prices go up so that people can't buy. But um that is the case in-in what they have done in England [Elliott Roosevelt: Well, I would say that—] in putting—making it much more difficult for English people to buy things which they sell for ex-- which they use for export and sell at a less um at a less expensive price somewhere else.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, they do have rationing of uh of uh—[ER: Essentials.]—foodstuffs, but for instance on clothing, they've taken the rations off.

[ER:] Yes, and then they've-there they've made it very expensive.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And actually today, the price of clothing roughly compares to that of the United States. [ER: Yes, but—] Now, on foodstuffs, uh would you say that their rationing gives them uh any lower prices in comparison, wage-wise and otherwise, to what the basic necessities cost in the United States?

[ER:] Well, I think—I think this: if you take—if you go over the cost of living, you can live more cheaply in Great Britain for a number of reasons.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Sure, without eating.

[ER:] Um, well you can't get much to eat, do you see? So, uh for instance you take um one of my young friends. Every person, she said in an interview that I had with her, uh is allowed two eggs a week. So, your child gets two eggs a week, and then mother's and father's eggs included, and that's how the child gets one egg-egg um four days a week. [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, this particular young lady that you're talking [ER: Or six days a week.] about has a husband and two children, so that the child gets two eggs a week plus uh two of father's eggs, or mother's eggs [ER: So each of them gets four eggs a week.] and so in between—so between them they get four eggs a week. Uh it's a pretty poor family in America that can't afford to give their children uh certainly four eggs a week. And this is what I would consider a very uh—well if the young man that you're talking about is a publisher, uh and [ER: Well he's young!] I know that the publishers of your books and my books in America uh certainly can afford to feed their children a whole lot more than—

[ER:] Yes but your publishers in England are having um uh—they're having pretty poor pickings just now, because the cost of paper's gone up um something like 60 percent, I think. And uh you pick and choose pretty carefully what you publish and—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, well then maybe they're not quite typical, but if uh we take eh a steelworker in England as against a steel worker in America, with the comparative wages a steel worker in America, if he has two children and a wife, can certainly afford to buy more than uh four eggs for the children.

[ER:] Well I don't, of course—in-in Great Britain he can't buy them because he isn't allowed to have them. That is not a question in that case of the money you have, it's a question—or the money you can spend on your budget—um it's a question of uh scarce supply. Now um on-on many things—for instance your-your ration on meat in Great Britain, one-one young woman said to me that she had always thought that she could cook fish in many different ways and she would never grow tired of fish. Now she felt if she ever saw another piece of fish, she would die. If the time ever came when she didn't have to eat it to stay alive! And-and [laughs] I um, I-I think that Great Britain's rationing is completely fair. It's possible to have enough to eat on it, and yet the children in Great Britain are certainly healthy-looking and they must get good food, though it's not as much as what we would give a child in our country. For instance, I doubt if they ever have um meat in the way that our children have, because the ration on meat would be about um one chop per person a week, and two ounces of corned beef. So that um would give you about all that you can have per week.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, well then uh to go back to my original question uh can you find a basis whereby the inflation that exists in the United States today can roughly be compared with that that exists in Britain?

[ER:] Well, we-we are entirely rationed by cost. Um inflation, which uh we have had, just means that people can't buy. Now, I don't think that they are as restricted as yet because there is very full employment at present in the United States, though my-my friend from Ukraine on the Human Rights Commission, the other day, told me that we had people at the present time in Southern California dying in the streets of hunger in large numbers. And when I told him that I hadn't heard of this either in Los Angeles or San Diego and doubted the veracity of his sources, he said, "Well perhaps they died in their houses, but they died!" And I said well, I still didn't think that was possible, because they certainly would have some kind of welfare before they actually died. But um nevertheless uh there are people-- I don't-

don't want to minimize the fact that with the high prices and the cost of living uh there are people who are having a hard time. And one thing is that—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I can assure you they're not having as hard a time as they are in the Ukraine, even the best people.

[ER:] Well, that's all very uh very true, but I can't get into the Ukraine to find out!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] It's a matter of relativity of living.

[ER:] But I can't get there to find out! And um I have to um acknowledge that I don't believe—I think one of the things that makes a difference between um, let us say, uh the cost of living in uh Great Britain, the United States, and Switzerland is that while in Great Britain, let's say, it takes you longer to find a place to live. When you finally get it, it costs you less. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And it's um—here in Switzerland um I think you'll find that rents are less, um a good deal than what they are in the United States. So that I imagine today that more um of a man's income, wages, goes into rents than would go in on a comparative basis in either Switzerland or uh Great Britain as a whole. Um so that uh perhaps evens up a little. Then as I said, the cost uh is prohibitive. Now there is one thing we have that I'm always struck when I come to foreign countries: we have more food at far lower prices than they have um anywhere here. But again um let's say in Switzerland, um everyone goes home, as far as I can tell—at least I see the bicycles streaking past at noontime and coming back again over the bridge at two when work opens up again, do you see? At twelve o'clock things close, and at two they open again. And a great many, I think, of the workers even go home or eat in very small restaurants, but most-many of them go home. I'm told that an average uh family here um would not think of having meat every day. They would have in at the midday meal a very good, solid vegetable soup which was um cooked uh so that there was a lot of substance in the soup. And uh after that, they would have vegetables: potatoes, a great, good many potatoes, and some kind of another vegetable. And no meat, and very often no fish. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And at night they would have café au lait, bread, and cheese.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well you have dealt with the question of inflation in England and in Switzerland in terms of food, but I see that our time is getting rather short and I would like to just add a couple of observations of my own, and that is that uh in the United States we uh gauge inflation by such things as the price of uh television sets, the price of uh refrigerators, the price of automobiles and such like. And uh actually, the people always uh-uh until they-they find themselves out of a job, find that they are able to buy the necessities with which to live in the form of food. Whereas over here they have for many years been restricted on all of the things besides food, uh and new refrigerators and new television sets and so forth are practically unheard of.

[ER:] Well they don't have refrigerators in most places. [Elliott Roosevelt: That is correct.] They don't have refrigeration the way we have it at-in the United States.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So that therefore a comparison of inflation in the United States and a comparison of inflation over here is a very impossible thing to gauge.

[ER:] It's very difficult. There's very little comparison.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] At least from our standpoint as laymen.

[ER:] Exactly.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, well I think that's as long as we can take on this subject right now and we must turn the program back over to our announcer and get on with our interview.

[Break 12:31-12:36]

[Dee Tucker:] This is Dee Tucker at the airport in Geneva waiting for the arrival of Mr. Elliott Roosevelt. His plane has just landed and he is now getting off. You will now hear him in an interview with Mr. Filio [unclear spelling] of Swissair.

[Mr. Filio:] Afternoon, Mr. Roosevelt.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] How do you do sir?

[Mr. Filio:] Welcome to Switzerland.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, I'm very happy to be here in Switzerland.

[Mr. Filio:] How was your flight?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I must say that it was one of the smoothest crossings of the Atlantic that I have ever made, and I was very happy to have had this opportunity to ride on Swissair and I found the flight extremely comfortable all the way through.

[Mr. Filio:] I thank you very much. And are you going to stay for a while here in Switzerland?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, I hope that my wife and I will be here for quite a little visit with my Mother and that we will have an opportunity to see much of Switzerland.

[Mr. Filio:] I thank you.

[Break 13:36-13:46]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] From Geneva, Switzerland where, as you know, Mrs. Roosevelt is attending the Human Rights Commission meetings, we bring you the first of several distinguished guests from this very beautiful international center. I think I should mention that this is made possible through the very kind cooperation of the United Nations Radio Division and Radio Genève, the local broadcasting company. Mother, will you take over now and introduce your guest, please?

[ER:] With great pleasure, Elliott. My guest today is Dr. Charles Malik, chairman of the Human Rights Commission and chief of the delegation to the United Nat--of the delegation of the United Nations from Lebanon. I present to you Dr. Malik.

[Charles Malik:] I'm very happy to be with you, Mrs. Roosevelt. And uh I would uh take part in this discussion as you deem uh desirable. We have been enjoying the session so far, we have great deal of work ahead of us and uh all we can say is that we are missing Mrs. Roosevelt in the Chair immensely, every single member of the commission.

[ER:] Oh no, I think we have a much better chairman. Now first of all, Dr. Malik, as a preliminary to our discussion of the activities of the Human Rights Commission, I think it would be very nice if you would review the aims of the commission and where we stand today.

[Charles Malik:] The commission was set up in 1946 according to uh-uh a recommendation that uh you remember you yourself, Mrs. Roosevelt, brought to the uh-Economic and Social Council from the nuclear commission which was set up to inquire into the sole eh-problem of Human Rights. And from the very beginning, the commission received a mandate from the Economic and Social Council according to which we were supposed to elaborate an international bill of human rights and also to study the conditions of human rights throughout the world and to make such recommendations to the Economic and Social Council as we thought were necessary. We have so far been working on this problem of elaborating an international bill of human rights for four years. And thanks to your guidance, Madame, we were able in 1948 to work out, and complete, and proclaim in Paris the now historic document which is entitled the International -- or rather the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But from the very beginning, we were aiming not only at declaring, or defining, or making precise and clear, what these rights are in theory. What we had in mind from the very beginning and were charged by the Economic and Social Council to go ahead with this task of working out of international conventions, or what we call now Covenants or Pacts which will enable nations to ratify and to uh declare as part of their own internal law. At the present moment, we are engaged in what I hope to be the final stage, so far as the Commission is concerned, of working out the first such international instrument which will be uh open for signature to all states and we are hoping very much that before we are through, uh around the twentieth of May, we will have completed this document which will be the first of its kind in history. And we will submit it to the Economic and Social Council for further review and from that it will go to the General Assembly.

[ER:] Well, did-you found -- I know I have found that a good many people have always thought that the Commission in itself was court, and can't understand why we can't take up cases and find remedies for them as individuals or as groups. And uh I wonder whether when we have actually obtained a first covenant um that will be arranged for, that there will be a place um where satisfaction of some kind can be obtained.

[Charles Malik:] Well we actually receive, as you know, all sorts of complaints uh in the form of communications that people send to us in the Commission. But according to our terms of reference, according to our competence which is defined for us by the terms which we received from the Economic and Social Council, we are completely unable either to investigate these complaints or to do anything about them. Our powers so far are confined entirely to working out these international agreements and to submitting them to the General Assembly for its final review and from then to the various states for their examination and approval if possible. But when we are through with these instruments, then part of these instruments will be some kind of an international machinery, some sort of implementation whereby all of these petitions ought to be handled in a satisfactory manner.

[ER:] Well, that of course is one of the things that we are trying to do. Now I was interested, having um been lately with some people who have helped to elaborate the um human rights document, which is part of the Council of Europe's machinery-y. And uh they have set up a court. And um they feel that uh therefore they have gone beyond what uh we are planning to do. Um but as I talked to them, it seemed to me that they had limited um exactly what you were going to do far more drastically than this first covenant of ours will-will. They have left out, let's say, a good many things, though they put in others that uh -- so that the -- our covenant, our first covenant as I see it, will not really be identical with theirs at all.

[Charles Malik:] Well, this is very interesting; I didn't know that they had set up actually a court. Uh did you find out from them how this court is functioning and whether it is still-eh-eh whether it's already receiving cases and all this --?

[ER:] Well I don't -- I don't think so, not yet. But that is part of the machinery they've uh-they have set up. They've actually, as I-as I understand it, they've actually um worked out the machinery for a court

and um uh it's quite elaborate machinery I thought, when-but they have not permitted individual petitions. And um uh there are a number of things; you see they are set up with an assembly and a council of ministers, and the assembly agreed, for instance, to um the right of free elections, and the council of ministers took it out. And um then they um -- they had a number of-of things that they cited uh to me which was quite interesting, they have um -- they agreed to the right to work, but uh they have no-no agreement on uh the right to education, for instance, or anything of that kind. And um I was quite -- I thought it was um a rather interesting um comparison between the two documents and I felt that what we were doing perhaps showed um something in um the amount of time we had spent on it, that um we realized perhaps more of the difficulties. And also um uh had um had-had-had taken a little more discussion and consideration of the various um-uh points. Though I may be wrong about that because I haven't studied it with care, I've only just heard uh a couple of discussion around this uh Council of Europe uh human rights thing, and I have the document, but I haven't studied it carefully.

[Charles Malik:] Of course the-the European community is much more homogeneous than the United Nations.

[ER:] Oh, yes! And it's a very much smaller group than [unclear] --

[Charles Malik:] Therefore they can-and therefore they can easily agree among themselves as to a court like this, whereas you remember three years ago when the Australians came to us with the court idea they didn't find more than two or three uh supporters of it.

[ER:] No. No. And I don't think they would today. I don't think it could be done -- it could be agreed to today. But there's a great difference between the small group of European states and the sixty nations and uh a far greater divergence of background, and of religious um beliefs, and of customs and habits, so that -- after all as I've always felt the um-um whole idea of a-of a charter or a bill of human rights uh was that it would serve as something that would draw us all to a closer understanding of our various um-um ideas on what the importance of the human personality was. And that in doing that, it would be a sort of first foundation stone for creating peace in the world. And um so that's uh-that's much more difficult when you're dealing with so many nations. I um-I don't know whether that's what you think, but I --

[Charles Malik:] Well uh in a sense, the work on human rights at the United Nations is far more important and educative than the work within the European community, because uh the rest of the world must understand these ideas concerning the dignity of man, and this is the only way to educate them and to teach them about it. I think already the influence of the Declaration can be seen all over the world. And this continuing process of educating every one of the sixty nations in these fundamental ideas is one of the most important things that we are doing in the United Nations at the present time.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, may I interrupt for just a minute? Uh I hate to interrupt your conversation with Dr. Malik, but I feel that we must uh stop for just a moment and then we will return to this very interesting discussion which you two are having on a subject which you two are both very familiar with.

[Break 25:52 to 25:57]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now uh Mother, will you take up our discussion again with uh your guest of today, Dr. Malik of Lebanon, the chairman of the Human Rights Commission?

[ER:] Yes, I'm very anxious to take it up again, because I have a question I want very much to ask Dr. Charles Malik. To what extent do you think the covenant will be binding upon the countries which ratify it, Dr. Malik?

[Charles Malik:] It ought to be binding of them in my opinion uh 100 percent! When a country ratifies this covenant it has, thereby, bound itself before the international community to fulfill all its provisions. But now, some of these provisions may be such that they could not be immediately fulfilled. There you have, I think, [laughs] an opening for progressive advance in this field, provided you aim rightly and provided you help these nations to see their way in a cooperative, understanding manner towards progressive fulfillment.

[ER:] Aren't we really finding that that stands out in the um economic and social um and cultural rights um more than we found it in the first eighteen articles on civil and political rights?

[Charles Malik:] Yes, in a sense yes, but even in the first eighteen articles there are many countries that have not yet uh reached the stage of binding themselves to all the uh individual and civic uh rights that are enumerated in the first eighteen articles. Uh I think uh in respect to every article, you'll find uh some country, some country or other not quite prepared to bind itself completely to that particular text.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I would like to ask a question, Mother, because uh I feel that I like many other Americans uh-uh am not as familiar with uh this question as you and Dr. Malik are, and therefore uh I'd like to reduce it to terms which we can understand and which w-we're very familiar with in the United States. For instance uh I'd like to hear you both discuss the problems of uh-that arise in the formation of a covenant, which I understand becomes a part of our law if we ratify it with our United States Senate uh that might cause our United States Senate not to ratify. For instance, the equal rights of people to have the same privileges, uh which might meet with very uh drastic opposition in for instance our south where uh there is the question of-of uh the colored uh vote and so forth, as to whether they should have the same rights as the white people -- uh and then uh beyond that, the fact that uh that is not so much a question in in uh foreign countries, uh it's more a question of the-the right to live than it is in our country, and not so much the color of the skin.

[ER:] Well, that's funny because in the uh discussion that we had um-uh just the other day, Sir John Boyd Orr said that we were all fussing about a lot of rights that weren't in the least important, the one important one was the right to eat. [laughs] And uh that a great many people in the world didn't have the right to eat, and until that was secured to every human being, we were all talking a lot of nonsense when we bothered about anything else. [laughs]

[Charles Malik:] And it is no accident, I might add here, that although the Human Rights Commission had uh-had decided last year not to include economic and social rights in this first covenant, that decision was overruled by the General Assembly because a majority of these states felt that problem so deeply that they overruled the decision of the-of the commission and they said the first covenant must include the economic, social, and cultural rights.

[ER:] Because uh in those rights is really the r-right to eat! I mean, that's where you [Charles Malik: Right.] -- I don't think of course that it's entirely a question of the right to work, though we would be led by our Soviet colleagues to believe it was entirely a question of the right to work. But as a matter of fact, um it's largely a question of um cooperating to provide enough production in certain countries uh so that people do have a-do have the possibility to eat, isn't it?

[Charles Malik:] Yes, that's perfectly true. And uh I believe in this respect, you -- since you spoke, Mrs. Roosevelt, about the United States, I think in this respect the United States must come to its own and start leading the world in these, in this very important field. You cannot afford to sit back and always find yourselves on the defensive in regard to these very important plights. You must sooner or later -- I-I-I'm very sure uh-b-uh much sooner than you think -- come out and lead the rest of us and tell us, "Look here, this is what we believe. Let's all work together. We may not live up to our highest, but we are going to do

our best, and we want you also to do your best.” And when we find that that is your response, when your Senate -- you spoke about your Senate -- your Senate must certainly see that point. These days are entirely different from the old days when you could safely sit back and say, “We have our own internal law and we don’t care about the rest of the world.” Everybody today must care about everybody else, and certainly the-certainly the United States uh-uh-uh-i-is a very important power and you cannot afford to sit back the way you’ve been doing uh until recently and not take the lead in this very important matter. It certainly pains the friends of the United States on many occasions to find the United States taking the defensive when we all know that you need not do so at all.

[ER:] [laughs] That’s a very forthright statement, I’m glad you made it, Dr. Malik. And now to answer one of the things that uh my son brought up, and that is the- [clears throat] the very first article of the covenant says there shall be no discrimination against any human being because of race, or creed, or color and so forth, and um it would be quite impossible to have it otherwise because um almost two-thirds of the world are not white [laughs]! I don’t think that-so it would be utterly ridiculous, in a group of sixty nations, to expect that they would um –

[Elliott Roosevelt:] It might be very embarrassing you know, to the United States, uh to the white population of the United States, if two thirds uh or the majority of the world were to say, “We’re going to discriminate against the whites.”

[ER:] Well, I’ve seen that all -- I have seen that almost done! So that I don’t –

[Charles Malik:] I think the whites, my friend, in the next twenty-five years will be doing very well if they can get away without being discriminated against themselves!

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That’s right.

[ER:] I think so, without any question. [laughs] So that I think that it’s um-it’s something that nations, certain nations, have got to grow up about and we are among those nations. [laughs] [Elliott Roosevelt: That’s right.] It’s one of the things. But um I-I do think there are certain difficulties. Dr. Malik, you said that you felt naturally that this covenant, once ratified, must be one hundred percent binding. I agree with you, but I sense that um there are differences among the nations, even in our eighteen nations that now sit around the table, in the degree of what they mean when they say binding. Because for instance we in the United States, if we ratify a covenant, it has to become the supreme law of the land. That’s why Mr. Dulles, forgetting that um in order to ratify a covenant must be constitutional, said that we didn’t need for instance a federal-state clause because he said a cov-a-a uh treaty became the supreme law of the land, do you see? But the Senate will not ratify a treaty which is not constitutional, and therefore that is why we still make, though some of us don’t like it very much, a fight for the federal-state clause, simply because-ause it might be declared, just as the uh -- we have so much trouble over the genocide convention, because it has no federal-state clause. It’s one of the reasons, there may be others, but it’s one of them. And if we really are keen to have something ratified, that’s the reason that-that we hope uh to-to say what we think will make it cons-uh-constitutional. But even without that, even laying that aside, um I sense -- I sensed the other day when I heard um one of our speakers uh explaining what in his view the right to work -- just broadly stated -- meant that it was not the same thing uh as it would be if it was stated like that for us, to him, because in his very explanation of it, he said, “I take this to mean that a state is obligated to um provide some kind of work of use to the community.” Which is an explanation, but is not broad statement of the right to work and-which becomes an obligation. So I-I wonder if you’ve had that feeling at all, that there was a slight difference in the conception of the amount of obligation [Charles Malik: Yes.] that you undertook.

[Charles Malik:] Well no question, there are two schools of thought in the Commission about eh this right-this right to work. Uh one school of thought, which is led by the representative of the Soviet Union, believes that all right ultimately flows from and must be guaranteed by the state. Whereas the rest of us for the most part believe that right is the right to an opportunity to satisfy that particular right, and therefore the state is not obligated to make sure that the man has that particular sought right, but the state is obligated to make sure that there are conditions which afford eh-eh abundant opportunity for everybody to fulfill that right. And if he doesn't fulfill it, it will be his fault rather than that of the state. There are these two basic conceptions.

[ER:] Yes. Thank you very much. And I'm sorry but we're coming -- we've come to the end of our time, so we have to stop this discussion. Thank you, Dr. Malik.

[Break 38:04-38:23]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] This is Elliott Roosevelt speaking, and reminding you that you've been listening to the *Eleanor Roosevelt Program*, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at the same time. Today's program was recorded in Switzerland, and we wish to thank the Swiss Broadcasting System for making their facilities available to us, and also Swissair for transporting the recordings.

Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)
File(s): 72-30 (160)

Transcribed by Greg Smith
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