

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

May 1, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the relationship between Great Britain and communist China. In the interview segment, ER's guest is Victor Nyborg, president of the Better Business Bureau. In a final segment, ER reads a message about Israel Independence Day.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Victor Nyborg

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[ER:] This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking. Elliott and I are very happy to be able to bring you this program each day from my living room here in the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. I hope you'll find the program we planned for today an interesting one. Elliott, will you tell us about it please?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Today because the Better Business Bureaus have made their services available to everyone who needs it, we decided to make the inside story of those bureaus available to everyone who would be interested in hearing it so we invited Mr. Victor Nyborg, president of the Better Business Bureaus to be Mrs. Roosevelt's guest today. We're also going to spend a few minutes talking about England's opinions on some of the world's problems. First we're going to hear from the sponsors who make our recorded program possible, and as soon as we hear their message we will commence our discussion.

[Break 1:08-1:15]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now, Mother, we come to our discussion period. Mrs. Gladys Brown of Detroit writes, "You solicit questions, either communism is right or it's wrong. If Britain is so prone to appease Red China then why are our boys in Europe to defend her against communism? Or is it a case of wanting her cake and eating it too? Things that just don't make sense to the common layman."

[ER:] Well, it's very simple, I think, um to explain Great Britain's attitude. Great Britain feels um very anxious not to lose China completely to the communists. She feels uh that she has had for many years, through Hong Kong and various other um Chinese uh cities, a trade and an influence in China that has been profitable and also given her tremendous prestige. Um she is confident, whether she's right or wrong that it--by recognizing China we-we in the rest of the world um will have greater influence with the Chinese communist government. Now she doesn't say that we will keep it from being a communist government, but she says that there is no reason to suppose that a Chinese communist government will be like the USSR communist government. Um I think her hope would be that this might be even a more um liberal type of government than Tito's in Yugoslavia. Um she is inclined to feel that the Chinese are um a different kind of people and that they will never submit to the kind of police state um uh and satellite condition, which has been imposed by the USSR on the European satellites. Now Great Britain may be entirely wrong. I'm only explaining [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] what I think her motives are.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But don't you think, though, [ER coughs] that uh it's very strange that uh the British socialist government uh should be fighting to retain the so called open door policy in China, which was uh definitely imposed upon the Chinese in generations past. Uh and was willing to go all out to such an extent that she was willing to procrastinate to the point that she uh believes or hopes that the-that the Communist regime in China would not be hooked up directly to Moscow. (4:23)

[ER:] No, I don't think it's strange that she's willing--that she is anxious to preserve the open door policy in China. That was established not only by Great Britain but by us many years ago both in China and Japan.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ah yes, but we agreed with uh even with uh Chiang Kai-shek back in nineteen hundred and forty-three uh that we would oppose the continuance of ownership of uh key ports along the Chinese coast by foreign nations.

[ER:] That is quite true, but Great Britain has never said that that was her policy. Great Britain has always hoped to retain Hong Kong. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] That is one of the basic reasons that she is probably very anxious to be friendly with Communist China, [Elliott Roosevelt: But isn't that--] because she doesn't want it to attack.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Isn't that policy in itself [ER coughs] uh playing with fire uh in the first place uh—

[ER:] Well, naturally you and I might uh would say so, because um if you remember back um one of the things that um uh Father asked of Mr. Churchill at one time was whether he didn't think it would be a beau geste to hand it back to China. Uh in the interest of keeping China, by the way, a um uh a nation that would trade with the rest of the world [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] and feel that they wanted to do it and that it was not being imposed upon them. But Mr. Churchill very strongly [Elliott Roosevelt: Disagreed.] disagreed, because he felt it would be hurting the prestige of Great Britain, and um he, as you remember, stated that he was not going to in any way do anything which would hurt uh the empire as a whole. And um [ER coughs] so I don't think that we have ever upheld um the actual ownership of ports in China. What we have upheld is the um-um open door policy of trade between nations and we desired for that to go on.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh yes, well we've always been a nation uh a nation which advocated free trade and—and low tariff barriers and none of this artificial—

[ER:] Well-well-well wait a minute, we advocated very high tariff barriers for ourselves in the early days. [Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh yes, that is—

[ER:] We've only gradually come down a little bit, and even now you hear squawks now and then.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh, very definitely, but uh in comparison to the British Empire and the way the British Empire has operated—

[ER:] But they have advocated free trade—they have advocated free trade.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Within the sterling area.

[ER:] Yes, uh but uh they have uh—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] They have never advocated free trade uh where it operated to their disadvantage.

[ER:] No, but in the early days there was no such thing as sterling area. I mean it was free trade they wanted everywhere, and we set up the barriers um because our industries needed protection, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and um it's only lately you know that we've talked about sterling areas and dollar areas [Elliott Roosevelt: Well, when you talk--] and so forth. [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] When you talk uh only lately, you're talking of course of the last twenty years.

[ER:] Yes, I am.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I mean it's not in the last year [ER coughs] or so.

[ER:] Oh no.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh but I still get back to a point that uh I think is very, very strongly made by this letter, uh that the British not only are playing with fire but they are following exactly the same course uh that Mr. Chamberlain followed at Munich. When uh in order to retain a few temporary uh advantages of sitting on top of this uh fire cracker in Hong Kong, uh they are willing to-to appease and to uh trade with and give to -- comfort to a people who as soon as they are strong enough are going to turn around and fight the British just as strongly as they can.

[ER:] Well, I think that's very likely. They're-the British are gambling on something that I think is a poor gamble, but um they have great confidence in their own ability to negotiate and to hold their prestige. They may be right to. We don't know. They've been at this game longer than we have-have um. I happen—

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I don't think they've been doing so well over the last few years though.

[ER:] Well, that may be, but nevertheless it's-it's the-they've-they've uh they've had long years of experience and they're acting on their experience. Now, there are a great many people in Great Britain who have lived for many years in China, and I have been getting um long letters from some of them. They feel strongly against the um dickering that we have done with Chiang Kai-shek for instance. Um they feel that it would have been much better had we all recognized the fact that uh China um was not governed by the Nationalists, whether we wanted to take Red China [Elliott Roosevelt: Governed well by the --] into the UN or actually recognize it. Um they-they feel that it was plain that the Nationalists had been driven out to Formosa and that you couldn't say that people on Formosa governed or represented China as a whole, and therefore these people in Great Britain, I don't know how many there are but there are um--they're people who've lived largely many years in China, and who have a great respect, as by the way most people have who lived in China, [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] for the Chinese people. They feel that they will not be communists that--of the type that the USSR are, uh and therefore they advocate um recognizing uh Communist China. Now, I wouldn't dream of advocating recognizing Communist China until they had proved um that they had changed many of their beliefs and-and um were ready to undertake uh the type of [ER coughs] government that we think is uh a government one can live with in the world, but um I-I think you have to recognize that uh Great Britain has um a confidence uh that she can influence um people in different parts of the world and perhaps keep them in line, which is misplaced, I think, in this particular situation [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] but nevertheless explains why they've done certain things. (11:51)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] In other words, right now you're having a very difficult time upholding Britain's point of view.

[ER:] No, I am not upholding Great Britain's point of view because I don't agree with it, but I am explaining it, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and I think it is an explainable point of view.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh well, I think it is explainable but uh it's based on historic uh reasoning and not on the facts as they are today. I see that our time is up for this portion of the program and that we most move on, so until tomorrow on--we'll have to postpone further discussion on this subject if we have time then.

[Break 12:30-12:43]

[ER:] Over a million people a year call upon Better Business Bureaus for help with many kinds of business problems, and yet it's a service, I think, we've all taken pretty much for granted. And so today I've invited Mister Victor Nyborg, who is president of the Better Business Bureaus, to visit us all on this program and tell us the story of this very interesting group. I'm delighted that you could come today, Mr. Nyborg.

[Victor Nyborg:] Well, thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, it's certainly a pleasure to be here.

[ER:] Better Business Bureaus was started over thirty-seven years ago I understand. Will you tell us about that beginning, Mr. Nyborg?

[Victor Nyborg:] Yes, it's a rather interesting beginning. Uh back about thirty-seven years ago, the Associated Advertising Clubs of the World, that's rather an imposing name, uh were meeting in Boston, and they decided that um because of the type of advertising being used by the purveyors of patent medicines at the time that something had to be done to protect the future of advertising as a media to help develop our industrial system and to provide for a-an easy movement and flow of goods uh coming about as a result of mass production system, which was developing in this country. And so they organized a voluntary committee known as the National Vigilance Committee, uh was composed of leading advertising executives of the day. As a result of the voluntary work done by that committee, it was believed necessary to carry on and expand the benefits which had resulted, and so the National Better Business Commission as it was known in those days was formed primarily by the advertising interests. Out of that National Better Business Commission came local organizations in the various cities throughout the country and Canada, which developed into Better Business Bureaus, and today they are known throughout this country and in Canada as Better Busi-as Better Business Bureaus. Their primary work in those early days was to check on the advertising claims made, and through persuasion and encouragement and a desire on the part of business interests to carry on their advertising and selling practices in the public interest. As well as in their own interest, the uh various codes of advertising uh standards were developed. And the bureaus proceeded to work with the advertisers themselves and the various media to correct any statements or claims which seemed to be not in the public interest. As work went on it became necessary to get public reaction uh as to the various types of advertising which might seem to be misleading, and so the public was invited to come to the Better Business Bureau offices to make complaints and ask questions. Now in those days the-the contact were primarily complaints, but that picture has changed today. (16:00)

[ER:] Well, I noticed that uh um most of your work in the--as you just said in the early days was handling customer complaints. The opposite is true today. What's the reason for this change, do you think?

[Victor Nyborg:] Well, I think, Missus Roosevelt, the real reason for the change is the uh educational work which has been going on with the public uh through women's organizations and schools and parent groups and civic organizations. In which they've been told that the services of the bureaus are available that they need not wait until they've had an unfortunate experience because of a business transaction, and that if they will use the uh preventive services of the Bureau by inquiring about an unknown proposition or an unknown promoter or an unknown uh operation of some kind, that they can save themselves considerable time and uh considerable anxiety and the investment of their money and the purchases of their needs. And so by that process of education, the picture has changed so that the majority of contacts, the greater volume of the contacts from the public, uh is on the basis of inquiries about something rather than a complaint against someone or something.

[ER:] Well, I remember on several occasions having written to the Better Business Bureau to ask questions about something. And I'm told that 75 percent of all your contacts with the public are um made

up of answering questions or getting information for people before they enter a business transaction. Is that true?

[Victor Nyborg:] Yes, that is true. Based on uh last year record of activities by the Bureaus, uh they were reported into the Association's office uh slightly more than 75 percent of the recorded contacts were as a result of inquiries for information rather than complaints.

[ER:] Well, um I think it's very interesting the type of contacts that you develop. Now I was uh rather surprised as to hear about cooperative program that the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Naturally, many of the problems you've resolved for people never would have arisen if there had been a better understanding of how our business system functions. And so I'd like to have you tell us about the cooperative program with the secondary school principals. (18:37)

[Victor Nyborg:] Well, it is an extremely interesting program, and uh to the credit of the educators of the country I think uh I should start by saying that the National Association of Secondary School Principals as early as 1940, or in 1940, were making a study of the type of consumer education uh text material available in the schools for teaching purposes. And they found that there was a uh a definite uh shortage of good factual information that was of an up-to-date nature and which would give a good, a clear picture of how uh a business organization uh should operate and must operate [Victor Nyborg clears throat] and the best manner in which uh members of the public could get the best possible satisfaction from their dealings with business. So the National Association of Secondary School Principals uh were looking around for an organization through whom they might obtain the cooperation of business without any strings attached. In other words without having any of the material developed, having any uh slant or promotion of a business uh of a business nature in the selfish interest [ER: Mhm.] of business that is. And so they-they uh approached the National Better Business Bureau, which is one of our uh organizations that operates on the national level as the local bureaus do on the local level. As a result of that contact and agreements which were set up at the time, the National Better Business Bureau arranged with business to supply the funds necessary for the National Association of Secondary School Principals to make a further study and to develop as a result of those studies the necessary teaching materials. And so they did receive and have developed eleven teaching units and there are two more in the process of development.

[ER:] Well now, uh can you tell me any-something about some of the courses that are brought to high school students through the program?

[Victor Nyborg:] Well, through this program in the eleven uh teaching units there is one on advertising for example. There is another on [ER coughs] on uh-uh legal matters, which should be known to uh the average person, to the lay-person. Uh there are uh teaching units, there's one teaching unit on uh the subject of consumer credit and the various uh means of borrowing money and the various means of buying merchandise on credit, uh what it costs to do so and uh all of the things that should be of interest and of value to a person. (21:22)

[ER:] That's very valuable to have that in the high schools, I think, for young people before they finish their school time.

[Victor Nyborg:] Yes, it is because uh there-there's such a large percentage of our youngsters who do not go on to higher aca-uh-academic training, and they have to depend on the knowledge they get in-in high school to guide them in their business transactions in later life.

[ER:] I-I think that's very a good thing. Last year I understand that President Truman com-commended the Better Business Bureaus for being largely responsible for cleaning out the shady areas of the

commercial world. I-I'd like to know how a voluntary organization such as yours, supported by funds from business alone, carries so much good influence with business.

[Victor Nyborg:] Well, it's a little bit difficult to answer that very sharply. I think the-the easiest answer to it would be that because of the service which the Bureaus have performed over the years they-they have been accepted, they have the confidence of the public and because the work of the Bureau is in the public interest and is made possible by the business organizations which support the bureaus, and indecently there are more than sixty thousand business firms today supporting the work-- [ER: Sixty thousand? That's--] sixty thousand -- and they have in their-in their employ more than uh thirty-eight million employees. So you see the services of the Bureau, uh through the arrangements of business, uh made available to the public, and so as a process of building up their confidence uh I think that's the real reason that we're able to accomplish so much through business and in the name of business.

[ER:] Well now, I'm just going to ask you one question that of course you can answer very quickly. Advertising has become such an important part of our economy, Mr. Nyborg, do you think most of it is truthful?

[Victor Nyborg:] I think the great majority of advertising is truthful.

[ER:] You really do? [Victor Nyborg: Yes.] That's interesting.

[Victor Nyborg:] Uh if I might take just a moment to say that on the base of the figures reported last year uh the Better Business Bureaus investigated uh, this was 1949, and I'll use uh that as a comparative figure for 1951. In 1949 more than thirty-six thousand advertisements were investigated by Bureaus. In other words, they suspected that something was wrong in one of the claims made in the advertisement, and out of that only 269 of those investigated advertisements had to be referred to some uh federal, state, or uh city authority for corrective measures. All the rest of them, with the exception of that about one-one hundred per-- one percent I think it figures out, uh all the rest of them were corrected on a voluntary basis. I think that the average housewife might well look at advertising without feeling that she has to be suspicious every time she does so.

[ER:] Well, I know that will encourage great many people. Now for a minute we have to let our announcer have a word.

[Break 24:34-24:42]

[ER:] [ER coughs] Um now we come back to the interview with Mr. Victor Nyborg, President of the Better Business Bureaus. And I am told, Mr. Nyborg, that uh there are over eleven and a half million television sets now in use, and I know that there's been a great deal of discussion about the truthfulness and propriety of some claims manufactures have made for their sets. Many of them are responsible, well-known manufactures, and yet they seem to exaggerate. I wonder if you can tell me why.

[Victor Nyborg:] It's interesting, Mrs. Roosevelt, to have you say that they seem to exaggerate. I think that's uh very significant, because as we look at advertising with the development of the various uh electronic devices and uh the various electrical gadgets, which we use as labor saving devices, it sometimes seems very difficult to believe that they can do all of the things claimed for them. Uh you say eh that they seem to exaggerate, and I think that as I said is significant, because you can't look at advertising and on the surface of it and say that it e-either is or is not an exaggeration. The only way we can tell, and it's a policy which all of the Bureaus follow, is to check that advertising; in other words, respond to it if we're interested in it and examine the claims made. Now it is true that in advertising a product, uh such as a television set uh as a new device, that all of the best possible claims are made for it

by the manufacturer in the promotion of it. And it's also true, and I think not too many people uh realize it yet, that the reception which one might receive on a particular make of television receiver might be excellent in one locality and yet be very poor -- that is the reception might be very poor in another locality. Yet the efficiency of the two receivers or of one receiver moved from one place to another is the same but there are obstructions, building obstructions and mechanical obstructions, and so I think on the whole while the claims for some of the television uh receivers have seemed to be exaggerated, they haven't necessarily been exaggerated. And uh the point I'm trying to make is that the public should understand that the same kind of reception cannot be received in every locality. (27:19)

[ER:] And that where a thing like television set is concerned they must um try to find out what the reasons are in-in some of the cases.

[Victor Nyborg:] Yes, unfortunately, of course, uh television uh being so new, not many of us know about the mechanical make of-it and uh what is needed uh in the way of correction if something goes wrong, and so we've had to depend on service organizations, repair and service organizations. And it's-it's an interesting thing that most of these have not been service organizations connected with either retailers or manufactures, and here for the first time in a-in an important industry we find that the chain of responsibility is broken in three different places. The-the retailer of the merchandise assumes no responsibility for the service of it because the customer has bought a service contract from a third party. And the manufacturer obviously is not responsible for that service organization does. This has led to the uh the start of a great many service organizations who have known nothing at all about the proper servicing of the equipment. And so here in New York City, for example, as well as in some other cities, the public has paid in a great deal of money in advance on service contracts to service organizations which have later closed up because they were incapable of servicing the equipment which they had contracted to service.

[ER:] That's pretty bad.

[Victor Nyborg:] Yes, it is.

[ER:] Well, you were telling me before the broadcast that Better Business Bureau managers in the early days had some rather harrowing experiences with frauds and schemers, and I suppose what you've just been telling me is one of the frauds sometimes.

[Victor Nyborg:] That's so.

[ER:] In fact, you mentioned being threatened with bodily harm yourself in Hartford years ago. Must have taken a great deal of courage to expose people who've done something wrong, but I suppose now that's all in the past.

[Victor Nyborg:] I think generally speaking it is. There are times when uh particularly what we call the professional promotion field, some of the characters, uh let's say, who are involved are not um in the white collar uh banditry class, because that class usually does not uh attempt to uh um do any harm to anyone except take their money, but they don't do bodily harm. But occasionally there uh comes into that field uh a group of individual who are strictly racketeers of the so-called hard variety, and uh there might be some danger. I haven't run into it personally in a great many years, and I-I'm glad to say that.

[ER:] [ER laughs] Well, I hope it's something of the past. To get back to advertising for a moment, how do Better Business Bureaus stop an advertiser from using misleading advertising?

[Victor Nyborg:] Usually by the establishment of uh codes of advertising. We have developed over the years uh what is known as a guide for retail store advertising and selling that has some three thousand

definitions in it as to proper advertising and proper terminology in advertising. Now, uh the Bureaus will respond to advertising, they will buy merchandise, if they find there is something wrong they will bring the matter to the attention of the advertiser and they will ask for a correction. Uh as I pointed out earlier in our conversation, the prime uh-uh weapon so to speak or tool for that purpose is one of persuasion, and uh our experience is that business generally wants to do the right thing and so it's rarely uh—

[ER:] It's rarely that you really have much trouble.

[Victor Nyborg:] That's so, yes. (31:20)

[ER:] Well, there's been a good deal of talk lately about the number of charitable organizations requesting donations, and because most of them are doing fine work many people want to help them but with so many it's difficult to know whether each is legitimate. I know your Bureaus investigate almost all appeals for money from the public, how can a person avoid giving to questionable charities?

[Victor Nyborg:] The only [ER coughs] possible way eh to avoid giving money to questionable charities is to make sure that the uh person making the solicitation is an authorized solicitor for a legitimate charity or philanthropic organization. And the only way to do that I suppose is to make sure that uh most of your giving is uh made to organizations with which you are familiar, in other words, uh those whose work your--is known to you. Then if you have any question about a solicitation of any kind to make a proper inquiry. It can be made to the Better Business Bureau, and in many communities if there's no Better Business Bureau, it can be made to the Chamber of Commerce or even a community chest office will very often be able to give proper information or factual information, but generally that is work carried on by the Better Business Bureaus. And then after you uh --the uh person has obtained factual information, uh it's up to that person to decide how uh he or she wants to spend the money, how he wants to give it and we simply suggest having eh gotten the facts then to give wisely.

[ER:] Um there are occasionally in almost everybody's mail I think, appeals from individuals. Is there any way of checking those?

[Victor Nyborg:] There's no way I know of to check them from the -- that is, uh from the standpoint of stopping them because uh there--there just isn't any way of doing that unless it's fraudulent and then of course it can be referred to the Post Office [ER: Mhm.] Department and they'll take the proper action. But an investigation of the person making the solicitation can be made and again the same process of getting the facts and then determining what you wish to do.

[ER:] Can it be made uh through a-a bureau such as the Better Business Bureau?

[Victor Nyborg:] Oh yes, it can uh no matter how small or how large the solicitation is uh the-- if it's a legitimate proposition the persons behind it are always willing to give the facts. If there's something questionable about it then the promoters or the people behind it are not so willing to furnish the facts. (34:02)

[ER:] That's interesting. What are Better Business Bureaus doing to protect business and the public during our mobilization program?

[Victor Nyborg:] We've attempted uh during the present emergency uh to uh do just about what was done by the Bureaus on behalf of business during the last war, and that is to make sure that advertisers, for example in connection with regulation W on credit advertising, do not advertise in such a way as to cause uh scare buying and--and so build up the uh the inflationary spiral, [ER coughs] and in effect cause higher prices on goods.



[ER:] Well now, before we have to close, Mr. Nyborg, I wonder if you'd tell us where people can write when they have a question about the reliability of a company and there is no Bureau in their city and if there is a charge made to the question of when you supply information.

[Victor Nyborg:] Well, the uh public can write directly to uh the National Better Business Bureau in the Chrysler Building, New York City, if there is no Bureau in their own community, or they may contact their local Chamber of Commerce and thus get information. There is no charge at all to the public for Better Business Bureau service.

[ER:] That's-that's something that I think everybody will be glad to know, and I thank you for being with me today. I'm sure it's been informative for a great many people, and now I'm sorry to say our time has come to a close. Thank you, Mr. Nyborg.

[Victor Nyborg:] Thank you.

[Break 35:38 - 35:47]

[ER:] If you want to help your friends and relatives in Israel celebrate Independence Day on May 11th. Then act now. You can send a care standard food package for ten dollars or the new eighteen dollars and twenty-five cents family package which contains a whole canned chicken and other good things. Today order a care kosher food package through HIAS, 425 Lafayette Street, New York or your local HIAS office. HIAS is the only Jewish organization handling care packages for Israel.

[Elliot Roosevelt:] 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 Elliot Roosevelt speaking and wishing you all good day. (36:58)

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