

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

1951-03-09

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about non-communist countries selling goods to Russia that end up in North Korea. In the interview segment, ER discusses the rescue of people from communist-controlled Germany with Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt, director of The Fighting Group Against Inhumanity. Radio show, ER responds to letter regarding countries selling goods to Russia that end up in North Korea, Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt describes his organization The Fighting Group Against Inhumanity. The organization worked to rescue people from Communist controlled Germany.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt

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

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt, Mother's guest today, is a native of Germany. He brings us a most interesting story about his activities in West Berlin. Dr. Hildebrandt has, at considerable personal danger, dedicated himself to the rescue of his fellow co-countrymen whose circumstances have put under the yolk of Soviet oppression. Before meeting Dr. Hildebrandt, I want Mother to discuss a letter she's received from Mrs. Halpern of the Bronx. Mrs. Halpern's letter touches on a subject that has aroused a national storm of protests. But first, a word from our sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

[Break 1:11-1:17]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Our question today, Mother, is from Mrs. Edith Halpern of uh the Bronx, New York. She says uh, "There is a matter which troubles me very much which I am most anxious for you to discuss. Your opinions are of great importance to me and I value them very much. I've been reading in the papers and hearing on the radio the fact that our allies in the Korean War, such as England and India, are furnishing materials for war -- such as rubber, steel, et cetera -- to Russia, who in turn gives the Chinese the weapons that kill and wound our boys. They are also selling these materials to the Chinese communists. When they are asked about this matter, they answer that if they don't, someone else will. Profits as usual at the expense of the lives of our sons. How patriotic can one expect to be under such circumstances?"

[ER:] Well, I doubt very much if at present um any of that trade is going on. Uh, there were trade agreements between various nations with China and with Russia, and undoubtedly at the start, those trade agreements uh continued to be in operation just as, if you will remember back, um it was found that we had certain agreements that continued until it suddenly dawned upon people what we were -- what was going on in our industry, that they had entered into contracts, and the contracts were still being filled.

[Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And um, I imagine that happens in other countries as well as in ours. And um I do think that the argument is a pretty poor one when you say -- but it's an old one that we've heard pretty often, I've heard it in the United States -- um that if we didn't sell certain things, somebody else would.

[Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] And that it wouldn't prevent the people from having the goods, therefore, it was uh better that we should get the profits.

That's a very poor argument, I think, and in the case of this kind, it's um very necessary to make representations and have it stop, and I think it has stopped to a very great extent by now. Though undoubtedly it was so in the early part of-of um uh war, just as it was so up to the attack on Pearl Harbor, as far as the United States and Japan were concerned. And in that case, it was deliberately done because a great many of our people in Congress felt strongly that if we stopped filling the agreements that we had entered into, we would bring on a war, [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] and that the one way to um uh keep on a friendly basis with Japan was to continue to deliver the very uh scrap material which later came down on our men. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And I can remember all those arguments and all the um -- there was a profit motive there, but there was, in that case, also the argument of a great many of our congressional people who felt that uh Japan uh could be trusted to remain uh friendly with us, and that if we did it would be considered as an act of war. Well now, that same argument is probably going on, for instance, um in other countries where they don't want to actually [Elliott Roosevelt: Well it --] do anything which might bring war.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] In actuality, it uh can be defined as an appeasement uh policy, a policy that you hope is going to uh make people feel more kindly toward you, therefore uh you go ahead and follow it out uh in the hopes that they won't turn around and use that against you.

[ER:] But you're finding that it doesn't pay. Is really --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I would think that in the history of the world that the policy of appeasement has been disproven as an effective weapon so often that the world by now would have discarded it as a means of uh buying a little time of peace for yourself.

[ER:] Yes, well I would feel exactly the same way, [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] and I-I think that I have already seen that we made representations to um uh both Great Britain and any other allies that were um uh carrying on any kind of trade, and that it has been stopped.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh yes, I understand that Great Britain has issued the orders that there should be no more materials uh of war that could possibly aid either the Chinese communists or the Russians that would proceed forward. Of course, um it's too bad that it took so long to wake up to the fact, and it's also, I think, partially our fault that they felt that they had to enter into contracts of that kind in order to bolster their own economies uh when -- if we had been thoroughly awake and had been bent on preserving peace and not allowing the traffic in war materials and basic materials used for war, that then we could have stepped in and uh said to England, "All right, now we'll step up our purchases from you t-in order to take up the slack of what you would have made if you had made this trade with the Soviet Union." (7:24)

[ER:] Yes, but that, of course, you have to persuade um the whole of Congress to join with you in doing, or your industrial um groups to join with you in doing. And um you can't always do that very quickly.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Well, I-I'm sure that you're right, but uh I believe that uh your industrial groups and your labor groups in this country [ER: Could be persuaded.] could be gotten together now uh and for the future on a policy that is -- uh where there's a watchdog committee, or some kind of a group who uh keep an eye on the movement of all such materials, and uh they say to industry and to the government, "Now's the time for us to act, act quickly."

[ER:] Mhm. Well, I hope there is.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, now-now the problem comes up, uh what are we going to do uh to see to it that Great Britain doesn't suffer as a result of our representations and the fact that she has stopped making such shipments? Are we going to take the steps now to ensure that her economy is not hurt?

[ER:] Well now, that I think is something which uh we should-we should uh consider very carefully. But I don't think you'll find a great deal of sympathy for that, because a great many people will feel that uh our economy is strained to the last degree, and that we can't take over the responsibilities of all the countries of the world that are hurt or that uh have to take on uh extra um sacrifices because of things they have to do uh in the present situation. Uh I-I feel, as uh I know you do, that um we could probably afford to make more sacrifices than many of the people who are our allies. But um just as soon as you advance a theory of that kind, you are reminded that there are people in this country who can't make sacrifices and must be safeguarded. And it's always difficult to do it in the--um in a way which won't hurt someone--
[Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] some group.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm. Well, I think that uh-that that probably answers in the main the question from uh-uh Mrs. Halpern, but the -- I think last line of her letter where she asks, "How patriotic can one expect to be under such circumstances?" -- I think that the answer is that we all -- uh, is contained in your last statement that we all must uh be patriotic, and we must be prepared to make sacrifices in order to see that these things don't come to pass themselves.

[ER:] I agree.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You agree. All right, well then I think that has answered Mrs. Halpern's question, we will now go on to another part of the program.

[Break 10:45-10:55]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] These days, we're constantly hearing about the dangers of communism, and many people have despaired that anything can be done to fight this menace to civilization, short of outright war. So it was exciting and encouraging to discover that there are people who are gambling their lives against their faith in humanity to work behind the Iron Curtain against entrenched communist forces. Mother, I know that you're anxious to introduce our guest, who is here in the United States on a short visit from West Berlin. And he has an amazing success story to tell us.

[ER:] Yes, Elliott. Dr. Rainer Hildebrandt, who is my guest today, has accomplished wonders, which I too found most exciting and encouraging. He is the director of the Fighting Group against Inhumanity, and I'm going to ask him to tell us just what this group is doing. Dr. Hildebrandt.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt, that you give me this opportunity to speak for those who cannot speak.

[ER:] Well first, Dr. Hildebrandt, I'm very happy to have you here. Will you tell our listeners a little about yourself and how you became interested in your present activities?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Perhaps I can describe you best when I d-describe you how it came that this group was built up. It was now two and a half year ago that the first who were in the concentration camps in the East Zone of Germany were released. But one didn't know at all that they were released. They really disappeared; they wouldn't speak to anybody what had happened to them. And so I tried to get contact with these people and ask them, "Will you not say more?" And they were very afraid. But then when I g-got more and more about to-to speak with them, I got knowledge that there must have been terrible things happened in these concentration camps. That more than half percent were starved to death. But they were not ready to speak about it.

[ER:] More than ha-half of the people in the concentration camps? Now are you talking about Nazi concentration camps or communist ones?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] No, Soviet concentration camps in the East Zone of Germany.

[ER:] In East-in East Berlin [Rainer Hildebrandt: Yes.] and in the eastern part of Germany?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Sure. They were starved to death. And though I--it seemed to be very important now to make a meeting where those people speak on an open podium. And then it was very difficult to get these people to speak, and we had always to postpone this meeting. And then they began to speak. We found two who were ready. And we can really say this first meeting was called "Silence is Suicide." This broke the ban of silence, and now came more and more people to me and ask me, "What can we do? Can we not um help more these people?"

[ER:] Well now, had they-had these people escaped into West Berlin from concentration camps?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] They were released, really released, and they were only released, and that seems to me important just to say also here, because all people asked, "Where are they?" There was a cry especially of the parents. So the Soviets turned always their--changed always their tactics when they were forced from the pressure from outward. But those who they released they brought them before in special camps where they -- in a quarantine where they get more and more to eat. And so they got twenty and thirty pounds more, all of them, at least. And also their hairs became long, and then when they had a human-a more huma-human being look --

[ER:] Then they let them out.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Then they let a few, not all eh-not all, but they let a small part out so that they could say, "We release also."

[ER:] Oh. And that's how the first ones got into East Berlin?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] West Berlin.

[ER:] West Berlin.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] In-into West Berlin, yes.

[ER:] Oh, I didn't realize how that-the Soviets felt the pressure and the need to find some of the people that were being [Rainer Hildebrandt: Yes, yes.] asked for.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] You see, they are more or less always forced to operate tactically. They need to be, what one says in German, "salonfähig" [socially acceptable]. I don't know whether that -- [ER: Oh yes. Tactifful-- yes. They are-they are made to --] You-we know they will speak also with Western, they will make conferences and so on, and so they need to be in a good standing. And so they change sometimes in a certain extent their tactics, and we can really help the people, and if you make a great pressure -- so also those who were--who came out of the concentration camp, they say all that the conditions in their camps changed only when one knew outside that there are existing camps and what is happening in these camps.

[ER:] Well now, let me ask about this young man that we had-uh that appeared in our papers the other day, and that everybody um uh was talking about, who had stated that he would not do something. Um I've forgotten what his name was.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Hermann Joseph Flade, I think.

[ER:] That's it. Well now, what has happened to him?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] He was sentenced to death on a trial. It was ol-of the few trial who was openly; most trials are in secret behind prison wall, without witnesses, uh with-without um lawyers. But at this trial, and it was open and he could speak. Now he was sentenced to death. But um now the world conscious was really awakened. And perhaps you know also that also--and I'm very grateful also that American people [ER: Yes.] helped in this awakening of the world conscious --

[ER:] And they uh they finally commuted his sentence, didn't they?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes, and they're-they're came also from this country a great protest. And after this protest, of all these American organizations -- democratic organizations --has come, three or four days later, they changed um the judgement and said we make-we make another trial, and they make another trial. They have condemned him to fifteen years, but at least I think by this pressure from outside, uh a life was saved. And it's not only a life was saved, now these people behind the Iron Curtain know that we here outside know of their fate and that's what then encourages.

[ER:] Well, it seems to me that there ought to be more of that kind of pressure. Um because this, after all, is um just a continuation of the old Nazi camps and methods, isn't it?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] What concerns the extent of the victims, we can say it is just the same. What concerns the methods, it is a bit different. The Nazis um shot. They had that, and they had gas cells. They worked far more noiseless. [ER: Oh yes.] The Soviets pr--um no, the-the Nazis worked noiseful, I would like to say, but the Soviets worked noiseless. And if it-if the --

[ER:] They starve them to death.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes, and if a man doesn't starve to death in the first year, he starves in the second year, and the third year. So it's always most an illness; he is ill when he starves, when he's dying, so one can always say he had had a natural death. [ER: Yes, that's --] That's what the Soviets will have. They will ne-it's necessary that one never can say --

[ER:] In other words the-the Soviets are being a little cleverer.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes.

[ER:] Mhm. Um [ER clears throat] I um--what do you think the general feeling of people in East Germany toward communism is?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Hmm perhaps I can best explain it in a small accident who was not long-long ago.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Dr. Hildebrandt, would you mind just talking in a little bit more into the microphone so our audience can hear a little more clearly.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] All right. There was an accident who will perhaps might best explain this feeling of the population. There was a communist mass meeting in the east sector of Berlin where had to burn up the communist slogan, "American go home" -- "Ami go home." And there were great firework letters. And [coughing] now when this mass meeting began, all people looked there, there was music, but there burned quite other words. There must have worked a resistance man who has come up two letters. There burned the words "amigo me." You can translate it from Latin or from Spanish [ER: My friend, of course!] my friend. In other words, "Americans may not go home, they are our friends."

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] That's an interesting - that's an interesting anecdote. That really happened in uh [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] in East Berlin?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes.

[ER:] I should think the people who um who-who did it uh would have been uh open to accusations of disloyalty by the Russians.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Sure, not only that. If one would have gotten these people, they would have gotten at least ten or fifteen years. That's how the Soviets are working.

[ER:] Well, uh that's very interesting that um people dare do it in spite of running that risk. Um do you think there's any organized resistance behind the Iron Curtain now?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] We can speak of-of-a of a great, also an organized resistance.

[ER:] You really can? I mean you have a-- [Rainer Hildebrandt: Yes. Mhm.] um you feel that there are -- there is a real network of organization now?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] The might of this resistance is just in the fact that all -- what these men are doing is allowed in every free country, and the Soviets are forced to persecute these acts who are allowed in all free countries. If I could give you perhaps a few examples [ER: Yes.] what they are doing? One of the main thing is to protect the population of their own spies. So they look to those who then denounce people to the Soviet leaders so that they are arrested and come the concentration camp. And when once we began to broadcast these names, the situation in the East Zone changed really. A few examples: we called a girl who was an actress. Now next day, people -- uh small people only applauded her. Next day also, there were fewer and fewer people who applauded her. Now um she lost her engagement then after -- soon after some time. Or men who had a restaurant, people didn't any more go in. And now, the population began to feel that she is a might because all those people, those spies who were not yet broadcasted had to fear now the vigilant eye of the people.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh Dr. Hildebrandt, I hate to break in at this point, but I think we have to stop for a moment to hear from our announcer, but I know that we want to come right back to this very exciting story you have to tell of resistance going on behind the Iron Curtain.

[Break 23:39-23:47]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now we return uh very excitedly to the interview that Mother is having with Dr. Hildebrandt and his story of the fight that is going on against communism and behind the Iron Curtain.

[ER:] Well now, I have one thing I'd like to ask Dr. Hildebrandt: do all the occupying Russians seem to be completely convinced that they are right?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] No. And we see it at a great number of Russians who also disappear, who come over to Western Germany and who are staying now in camps. But we see it also in the fact that there has also been Russian officers who've warned German before being arrested.

[ER:] Who have warned the Germans [Rainer Hildebrandt: Yes.] before they were arrested? [Rainer Hildebrandt: They made it --] That's-that's taking a risk on his part.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Sure. Naturally, they had to make it very um -- for safety -- carefully, [ER: Yes.] but they have found also ways to help Germans. And so it seems to me very important that we really also see that in the Russian people who is--has to bring the greatest victims against the terrorism, we have an ally. And so we must make always, and again and again, the great distinction between the Soviet leadership and the Russian people.

[ER:] I-I think that's interesting that um some of the Russians themselves don't uh don't-- aren't convinced that what's being done is right. Um [ER coughs] I wonder what methods you're using to help those who are willing to take the risk of resisting?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] The first, naturally, is that um we bring them our understanding. They feel they're not very much understood. And so we made, for example, once a great meeting in Berlin Opera, and there we let a Russian speak, a Russian resistance man. And he described also the conditions in Russia. Then we made a great appeal never to speak of Russian policy, never of Russian government, but only of Soviet. That also Russian heard, and that made also a great help to this resistance. The more they feel from those outside of the real conditions behind the Iron Curtain, the more they feel also the real-the real-the liberators are living amongst them. And that's what gives them hope.

[ER:] That uh mere fact that they know that you--they have some people actually living near them, know what's going on and will report it, that gives the Russians hope on the out -- um of help from the outside.[Rainer Hildebrandt: Sure.]That's good. Well now, I um understand that the communists are so anxious to muzzle your activities that they've tried to kidnap you on several occasions. Is that true?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes, they tried it even still-still twice. I know of two cases.

[ER:] You know of two cases? So that you think um -- could you tell me what-how they tried to do it?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] The first time it was so that there was uh -- they knew that I go at a special day and to one that is near our office, and I uh bicycle there, and they had a car to overrun me so that I'm hurted. Then a second car had to come, and this second car had to contain this first car who escaped and say, "I will help you and bring you in the hospital." But when I would have come to this hospital it --this would have been not a hospital. [Rainer Hildebrandt laughs]

[ER:] I see, not a hospital at all.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes, and- [ER: Mhm.] and now they waited, this car, very long because I postponed my plans. And then-then a man saw these long waiting car-cars and he called police. And they-they've got one car, the other escaped, and they found a pistol in the car, and then after some time one of those four men who were in this car of the inmates made a whole confession. [ER: He made a confession.] Yes.

[ER:] So then you knew what they'd been doing. Well now, what can we in the United States do to help you and the people working with you?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] The first question, all those people willing to make resistance is: if I am forced to escape out of the East Zone, to go out, do I get a first help? The other question is: when I'm arrested, do those for whom I earn money, my relatives, my parents, do they get [ER: Do they get help.] he-help. Naturally, one must say no in this case. And I think it would be not be only be of a question of the German government, but of the whole world to help all those victims of the terror. That gives them the sense of their fight. That we know of them.

[ER:] Do you think the protests that came from this country um was a help? Um uh made the other people feel stronger?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] I think we have to -- far more to awake the world conscious against these human reasons. If this argument against the Nazi terror -- we speak first time of the gas cells, but we have now the same extent of inhumaneness, and we need really now to wake now the world conscious. Not only to speak of military or in economic terms against the Soviets, but these great human questions we face all and who makes all of us ask what are we doing to help these people.

[ER:] That's why you call your organization um the -- or say that it's against all inhumanity; it's really to teach people um to care for other people. Uh I'd like to ask you something about your observations in this country. What do you think of American methods of combatting communism?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] [clears throat] I can understand that you became in a certain extent confused in the last weeks, when you saw all at once how strong the enemy is. And so you had always to think in counteraction or against the strongness, and that could make you perhaps a bit pessimistic, because at the same time the Soviets um can mobilize eleven millions [ER: Mhm.] where you can mobilize only three and a half millions of people. And the economic power in the case of working together with Europe [ER: Mm.] would also be very strong. But at the other side, we don't see how weak this-the Soviets are at the same time. And what all can be done to increase this weakness. And if one gets more to know how weak this country is, and, therefore, it's necessary always, and again, again, to know what is going on behind the Iron Curtain. Then you also -- one could become here far more optimistic.

[ER:] Well, your-your feeling is that one of our troubles [Rainer Hildebrandt: Mhm.] is that we don't really see the weaknesses behind the Iron Curtain, and therefore that we are too much afraid of-of something we don't understand.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes. And I would also say that to really know how weak it is, is necessary a work in understanding. That universities and schools tried to learn the-the different communisims, as we can't fight it if you-we don't know the difference between the Americans, the Europeans, the Ameri-the-the Asiatic communists, the Stalinists, and the Titoistic ones. If you don't know really how it looks in the Russian people --the great tensions in the leadership, um the situation amongst the peasants, how the army is working against the party and the party against the army -- if you don't know, we cannot also put wedges.

[ER:] To make those tensions work against each other. [Rainer Hildebrandt: Sure.] I can see that. Well now, what do you think that people who are active in the resistance behind the Iron Curtain think about the United States? Do you think they know much about us or about our real feelings?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] They -- I would really like to say that they await something like a miracle of the United States.

[ER:] Like a what?

[Elliott Roosevelt and Rainer Hildebrandt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Miracle.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] M-miracle.

[ER:] Miracle, yes.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] They have such a great hope. Those who escape out of the resistance, they ask me far more what they say in Washington. How do the Americans think and act, they ask me thoughts, what is-uh what is Bonn-the German government doing? And they have a great feeling of sympathy to this country.

[ER:] They have really, you think, a sense of dependence on this country. In other words, uh they have hopes [Rainer Hildebrandt: Mhm.] that we might offer what we they would like to have: a better life and more freedom. Is that what you think they really have hopes of?

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Yes, and naturally they wait as amongst them self are leaving so many people, risking their lives, that also outside we look for ways to help them. The best we can say to them about democracy is not to speak of how freedom or wealth and healthy and all these things, but to show them that we look for ways again and again, and that we find way to protect them of their dangers, to help them where we can help, and to work in understating. So the great question we face is really also a moral one. That we do all to awake these better forces, not only think in military and economic power, who is also very important. That we believe also that we have the faith in these better forces. That these better forces where change cannot be prefo-proved beforehand there but wherever the good has been victorious the face in the might and the power of the good has went before.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Dr. Hildebrandt, I hate to break in again at this point, but I'm afraid we have to move onto another part of the program, and I feel that uh that last statement of yours of the moral strength that we have to put forth as a people in this country will be very strongly felt, and is a very timely message to our people in this country. Mother, I'm afraid we have to move on, so uh I think it's time for you to say goodbye to our guest of today.

[ER:] Thank you very much, Dr. Hildebrandt, I uh am very grateful to you for that last statement, and I hope that we in this country will be able to help the good forces of the resistance.

[Rainer Hildebrandt:] Thank you, and I'm sure I can also go with far more optimism go back than I came over here.

[Break 35:53-36:03]

[Elliott 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 Elliott Roosevelt speaking and wishing you all good day.

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Transcription: Julia Goldman

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Final Edit: Seth LaShier

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