

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 18, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt discuss civil service and efficient government. In the interview segment, ER and Senator Estes Kefauver discuss the Senate's Crime Investigative Committee and organized crime.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Estes Kefauver

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I have a question that uh was given to me by Harold Clay, you know, from Hyde Park who is uh now as I understand it the uh head of the New York district of the Federal Housing Commission, uh and he has asked a question which he'd like for you to discuss today, and his question is this: "As you know I have been connected with the government for many years, do you consider that the civil service system has operated to the best interest of efficient government?"

[ER:] Well the civil service system of course was set up to keep the government from being purely a spoils system and there is no question, but what it was, uh a very good thing to do.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] When was that done?

[ER:] I don't remember the exact year. But it was done a good many years ago, and we have now a Civil Service Commission with three commissioners. Francis Perkins who used to be head of the Labor Department is um head of the civil--is one of the three commissioners [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And um the people who are commissioners in uh the civil service in Washington. This is the federal civil service, we also have state civil service of course. [ER and Elliott Roosevelt briefly overlap here] But--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Does state civil service extend to all the states in the Union?

[ER:] I think there is a state civil service system in every state. I know there has been in New York state for many years because for a long time, many years ago, I was a member of the Civil Service Reform Association which was trying to correct abuses that grew up in the civil service system both in the state and in the federal government. Anything that you set up has drawbacks, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] there are always things that grow up, and one of the things that you notice about civil services, that um you have to, you can't remove anyone from a job that he's acquired by civil service, unless you do so under charges and charges have to be proved; therefore, somebody knows if they accept--um they're going into civil service they will probably never either take the risk or make the money that they would make in the outside business world, possibly.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] In other words civil service, ah operates so that it--it eliminates competition.

[ER:] It does eliminate um competition to a certain extent you go forward on a regular scale and um short of being really-- um pretty bad you're fairly safe to move forward on that regular scale. Now we used to notice in Washington, in a very minor way, some of the difficulties, uh if you get a civil service job and [ER coughs] you happen to be interested primarily in just um having a job, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes] not caring very much whether it's something that interests you or not, just as long as you are making a living and your life is really centered outside your job. The result is that in those cases we would have girls for instance who would leave a letter in the typewriter with only one line left to do, rather than continue three minutes after the time had come to stop for the day. Now that sort of thing is bad in anything and I

suppose it carries through even to higher brackets uh in in different various ways. So there are drawbacks in a civil service system and yet it is the only thing we have devised which keeps us um from having a very bad system which grows up when all the jobs in government are given out as patronage jobs [ER and Elliott Roosevelt briefly overlap here] and--(4:37)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I see so that when you change political parties, all the jobs would be changed, right on down to the doorman and--

[ER:] Exactly a certain number of jobs change even now, and the higher up you go they still-- they change-- more change, but that [ER coughs] was very bad because very often that could build up the type of bureaucracy um that where you really use government jobs from state and national and city and so forth, just to keep a party in power [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes] um and you really didn't build up an efficient public service, do you see, or people who had some sense of being in a service rather than just a job. Now if you instilled that into the civil service group, whatever it may be, that they are there and that it's a proud thing to be in the government service and they are there to serve the public, then you get quite a different thing. Then you get the same type of feeling you have in the Army or the Navy or the Marine Corps. Of being proud of the job you do and caring to do it well and then it's a grand thing. You have to have find out how things work and you have to change things, but then the civil service is at its best.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but now here is something that I wonder about, government has been growing bigger and bigger and bigger, therefore the civil service has been growing bigger and bigger and bigger also. Now if we decide at any stage, as for instance uh under the Hoover recommendations for the reform of our federal government system where they propose to wipe out a lot of bureaus and a lot of various agencies of the government and amalgamate them for greater efficiency of government, what happens? Can you fire civil servants or must they always be carried on the public pay role?

[ER:] No they must be, eh they would be kept on the list of eligibles, um I don't even know that they wouldn't-- I--I image they'd have to take their examinations over again every now and again.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But they can be fired?

[ER:] Oh yes

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlapping]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] If a job is done away with?

[ER:] If a job is wiped out, that that automatically loses, then they they're just not employed. (7:21)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but doesn't the civil service the way it operates, actually operates, so that there is a pressure group to prevent the the doing away of with uh an agency that has outlived its usefulness.

[ER:] Yes, I think there probably would be a pressure group uh that would try to hold jobs and I suppose-- or try to preserve a bureau or an office to hold-to hold jobs. And also, I think that there is always preference um in an organization for any employees who have been fired to come back uh as soon as it's possible to get them back um, but I--you can't prevent um the wiping out by Congress or by constitutional authority of some kind of um anything that is considered uh inefficient.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well do you happen to know whether uh any of the uh various bills that have been introduced over the last many, many years for the reform in our government and the doing away with useless jobs, whether if any of that has ever brought about any uh reduction in the overhead of operating our government?

[ER:] I don't know, um I imagine that there is an effort always to get back when-- once you've been in the civil service or in government service-- um there's probably an effort in one way or another to get back. And of course what has happened is that almost always when we make reductions an emergency arises and then you suddenly find a lot more people needed. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes] So I don't um, I don't believe that we've ever really made any big reductions that lasted.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, well I--you know I- I'd like very much sometime if you'd try ah to get ahold of uh one of the people who have been working on the Hoover Commission for the reform of our federal uh system of government, and get them to discuss this more at length. [Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlapping] Don't you think that would be--

[ER:] Oh, I'd like very much, to get someone from the Hoover Commission. I think that be a very good idea.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think that'd be of great interest to the general public because after all the general public pays the bill for all these people don't they?

[ER:] That's quite true.

(Break 9:52-10:10)

[ER:] Gangsters and organized crime have in recent years been something of a blot on the face of American democracy. Unfortunately, there are some people who take advantage of the freedom that all of us are permitted to enjoy and use it for their own selfish and vicious motives, so in order to combat the spread of big time gangsterism, which has been flourishing on an interstate basis, the United States Senate appointed the Crime Investigating Committee. I think we're all most fortunate that the chairman of this [skip in recording] Kefauver of Tennessee, is a man of complete political integrity and a true liberal. It is also fortunate that he is right here with me this afternoon to answer some questions which are important to all of us. Senate Kefauver I was interested to read your recent statement that you believe crime is bipartisan. I think some of us have been misled by the confusion between organized crime and politics, so that I--which I'm afraid is inevitable during a political campaign. (11:25)

[Estes Kefauver:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt that uh is true that when matters like this come up before a political campaign I suppose they do sometime take a partisan uh taint. But I do believe and I'm quite certain of the fact, and our investigation has shown very conclusively that racketeers and gangsters have no political philosophy. They're not interested in uh foreign policy; they're not interested in a domestic policy. It doesn't make any difference uh which party's in power, and so far as they're concerned they're only interested in, as we say in Tennessee, in feathering their own nest and in trying to get protection wherever they can. [ER: They only really use politics] so it isn't a partisan matter at all.

[ER:] They use politics don't they as just to further their own ends, but they're not interested in politics?

[Estes Kefauver:] That's uh exactly true uh in uh places where you have democrats in control, of course they're trying to make some headway with somebody in the Democratic organization. Where you have Republicans in control they uh are doing the same thing, as a matter of fact many of these fellows play both sides of the street. We uh very frequently have occasions where some racketeer during a certain time, when it served his advantage was a Republican, later on when he thought it might serve his advantage better he was a Democrat [ER: and quite] and for my part Mrs. Roosevelt, I regret the fact that anyone should bring in partisan consideration in this uh effort in which we are all united, the Senate, the federal government, the states, and local communities are all taking additional interest and trying to uh weed out and to stop this uh cancerous uh organized crime that we have in the United States today.

[ER:] Well a good many people I find have confused the New York City investigations, which are taking place in Kings County, with the work being done by the Senate Crime Investigation Committee. I wish that you'd straighten us out on that matter.

[Estes Kefauver:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, we of course are only interested in the uh nationwide and the large time interstate transactions. As a matter of fact the only uh business that we have in making this investigation at all is to determine where the vehicle of interstate commerce is being used to violate a federal law or a state law. Uh it's quite obvious that if we would try to solve every local murder or get into every uh local condition that uh we could spend all of our time in one place and then not have the overall picture. So uh while we are naturally interested in the Kings County investigation we do not find in it the wide interstate ramifications which gives our committee a particular interest in it.

[ER:] Well now, that interests me because just a little while ago, I should think the line eh drawing just where your interests came to an end would sometimes be very difficult. Now a few days ago I was sent an account of a case of a murder um and the plea that the person who wrote me about it made was that the federal government and I suppose uh, therefore, any investigating committee on a federal--of a federal coverage do you see [Estes Kefauver: Yes] should take an interest because the local authorities had done nothing to find uh the murderer. Now what happens in a case like that? I-I'm interested, I didn't know what to do.

[Estes Kefauver:] Well uh Mrs. Roosevelt, during the years I've been in Congress and the short time I've been in the Senate I've had similar requests, that uh the family of the person who has been murdered uh feel that the local officers are not doing all that they should, so that they ask uh ask me as their Congressmen or Senator to try to get the FBI to take jurisdiction. And then in our Senate crime investigation we have had uh hundreds and perhaps thousands of letters from local communities saying that their sheriff is bad and that there's some gambling organization uh in the city and that they can't do anything about it and they want us to come down and settle their own problems. Well I think it's very wise that the federal government not uh take a part in all of these things and not uh uh interfere unless it's a very unusual matter truly involving um interstate commerce or some federal statute. Because, uh if we started doing that well then local law enforcement people would take the attitude-- well let's turn it over to the federal government, there's no use of us trying to create interest in. (16:33)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well Senator Kefauver I'd like to ask a question that may be slightly embarrassing, because uh um it has to do with partisan politics. There's a great deal that's being written in the papers about the fact that your committee is really hamstrung and going after ah the real facts around the country on crime because uh democratic machines might be effected-- political machines-- uh do you feel that eh your committee before it gets through will ah get through to the root of all of these problems, regardless of politics?

[Estes Kefauver:] Well Mr. Roosevelt that's uh what we're trying to do, and uh as a matter of fact I think the Democratic Party ought to be entitled to some credit for the fact that we're trying to do something about it. In uh Illinois the other day um I was very happy to point out the achievements that uh Governor Stevenson has made in the state of Illinois and I also thought that Mayor Kennelly had done a substantial amount in trying to improve the police force, of course uh there are many, many more things to do but as long as we're making an honest effort to uh remedy the situation and to improve law enforcement in the nation I think we should have some credit for-for doing it. And we do expect to go into the big overall important situations to the extent that our time and uh our two-hundred thousand dollars permit us to.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes

[ER:] You are limited by that aren't you? [ER laughs] (18:14)

[Estes Kefauver:] Yes and as a matter of fact, uh the five members, um Senator Tobey and Senator O'Connor and Senator Hunt and Senator Wiley and myself, all of us, are very busy and we have many other things that we're supposed to do.

[ER:] So you are limited by what you can actually give in the way of time to these investigations. Well I was just thinking as I sat here, um it is important, I think, to leave, eh as much as one possibly can, to local law enforcement officers, but have some- some crimes seem very baffling, one doesn't seem to get to um any solutions, for instance does anyone know yet who shot at the Reuther brothers?

[Estes Kefauver:] No ma'am, I ah and uh think that they do not know although the Federal Bureau of Investigation I think has been in on the case, also there are forty-one unsolved gang murders in Kansas City and a great many in Chicago. Undoubtedly modern uh technological improvement has also uh helped murderers and uh criminals in uh carrying out their business.

[ER:] You ought to keep up though on the other side; you ought to be able to discover more people as well as they know better how to get away. I hope that modern technological improvement is going to work both ways.

[Estes Kefauver:] Well it certainly should.

[ER:] Now we'll turn it over to Elliott for a minute.

(Break 19:52-20:02)

[ER:] Senator, I know that many of the findings of your committee must remain confidential for the time being but can you tell us some of the things you have accomplished so far and what your aims are?

[Estes Kefauver:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, it's too early in our investigation uh so far to say whether there is a national crime syndicate or organization uh headed up by any one particular person and operating in all parts of the United States. I do think it's uh fair to say, however, that we have found that there are several organizations in various sections of the country that operate across state lines. For instance there's a group in the--in uh the northeastern section of the country then there's the ol' remnants of the Capone mob in Chicago or Midwest section. There's a group in Florida and a group in California and they uh all know one another and they have ah interlocking interests and they seem to be able to uh divide up territory, so as to prevent uh gang wars and that sort of thing. We have found also that through the distribution and dissemination of gambling news that that uh by virtue of the fact that it goes into all parts of the United States and uh usually around the distributors you find some racket elements, that that gives them a knowledge in one part of the country of the groups in the other part. And that really is the artery I think of--of the nationwide organization. Now there's been some talk about a so called mafia, and we haven't gotten a great deal of evidence about it, but we do find that uh in some of these gangs that uh one person will pay off the indebtedness of another, for instance in uh Chicago, we had the uh fellow named Calpona and uh Delucia who you will remember were convicted in the movie extortion case. While they were incarcerated it was established that they owed 120 thousand dollars on their income tax liability, so that uh one day into the auditor's office strange people walked and left 120 thousand dollars on the desk of the auditor to pay their income tax and no one's been able to find out who these gracious donors were. That uh might make a lot of us want to join some kind of organization [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] of that sort if we could. But uh our purpose is to uh we at first establish that uh there are certain interstate transactions, by virtue of modern technological advancements such as communications and whatnot, where the states have a very difficult time handling the problem themselves. For instance, one state may be uh diligent in its law enforcement and find that the gambling or the criminal operations will merely move over into another state, the state of Florida for instance passed a law prohibiting the intra- uh

communication of gambling news, what happened was the news would be phoned to Chicago and within uh two minutes would be back in Miami, so that they were using uh interstate communication to violate the law of the state of Florida, but because it was interstate the state of Florida couldn't do anything about it.

[ER:] That would lead one to think that there must be certain laws perhaps that you will find-- that you need in in uh working on these things. (23:50)

[Estes Kefauver:] Yes Mrs. Roosevelt um, back after the prohibition days, during the prohibition days, of course we had uh the gangsters [unclear] who operated uh in violation of the Prohibition act and then after that we had uh-uh bank robberies but the National Bank Robberies Act uh eliminated most of that. Then we had a great racket in selling stolen automobiles and taking them across state lines-- the Dyer act was passed to prevent that --and of course the Mann Act to prevent uh interstate uh dealing in uh prostitution and white slavery. Uh I think the laws that uh are indicated and the ones we've been thinking about are first to prevent to the shipment of gambling devices and interstate commerce to a state where it's illegal to have the devices. And second to uh at least delay the minute details about uh horse racing and whatnot that is the last jockey changes or the condition of the track, for a minute or two anyways, so it can't be used for book making purposes. Then um we could make some improvements in our income tax law which will um uh help a whole lot in dealing with the criminal elements, for instance if we should require anyone who makes their money illegally to file an income tax statement with their return every year well then the agents could uh work up net increase worth cases better than they do at the present time. And there are many other uh laws and things that will be helpful, but I think the uh most important thing is that uh all over the nation today I think there is an aroused public opinion demanding better law enforcement. it's been very heartening to us to uh see that uh crime committees have been organized, people themselves are becoming interested. Uh the federal government has uh—the Attorney General has had a crime conference. Then uh the American Bar Association has appointed a committee to work with us so that uh after all it's uh a public opinion and public demand for better law enforcement that is the most important thing and I think our committee may be doing something worthwhile in that respect.

[ER:] Well, I'm sure your committee is doing something worthwhile, but I can't help thinking, because as a rule, my mind goes to what causes these things-- and I can't help thinking that as you investigate you must sometimes feel that there are basic things. Something, uh perhaps that the community and the families are responsible for that bring about some of the crime of today.

[Estes Kefauver:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt um that is of course is the most important part of the whole matter. And uh in January or February we expect to have an all-out uh hearing about the causes of crime, juvenile delinquency and child problems and everything else that's considered to contribute to this difficulty. As a matter of fact we have sent out inquiries to uh juvenile judges and social workers all over the United States and we have a great wealth of material and I think uh this through the educational process may be helpful.

[ER:] You come very close, I suppose, in your investigations to some of the gangsters themselves and it must, at times, be interesting to evaluate the kind of people they are. Are they perhaps just eh grownup problem children who got off to a bad start, or are-- is there something different that you've come to?

[Estes Kefauver:] Well Mrs. Roosevelt we have been in touch with and have seen and have examined many gangsters whose names are well known. We had a uh a uh Mr. DeAndre who uh had been sentenced and was a gangster who has, I think genuinely reformed, testify before our committee in Chicago recently. And he said that the reason "I went around Al Capone and got mixed up with his mob was that I thought it was a smart thing to do. But it was the worst mistake that I've ever made in my life because I wanted to go straight sense then, but it's awfully hard to do." These uh gangsters of uh today are quite different from the ones that we thought of and knew in the 20's. They usually are uh well

dressed, some of them speak uh good English, some are well educated, most of them have uh good lawyers and accountants to keep their records in shape. The main thing that they want to get is respectability. Their great ambition is to make some money and then get into a legitimate business but uh there we have another problem because uh when many of them get into legitimate businesses they use the same methods of intimidation and coercion and unfair practice as they did during their gangster days.
(29:29)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well uh Senator Kefauver I'd like to ask one question and that is do you feel that the correctional intuitions that we have in this country, do you think that they are a doing a--on the overall that they are doing a good job of correctional work?

[Estes Kefauver:] They are improving, but on the overall they are not doing a good job and Mr. Jim Bennet the head of the Bureau of Prisons would certainly confirm that.

[ER:] Well I think that most of us who watch those institutions would feel uh that a better job was indicated and would be interested in new and experimental methods with modern science applied to it. Thank you so much for being with us today [Estes Kefauver: Thank you Mrs. Roosevelt] and good to—good of you to come.

(30:22)

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Transcription: Becky Mann
First Edit: Andreas Meyris
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