

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 27, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about whether a person should vote for the political candidate or the party. In the interview segment, ER interviews radio personality Henry Morgan.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Henry P. Morgan

[ER:] Well, Elliott, what is there in the bag today that you want to bring up?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I have a very interesting question here, which may be a little bit difficult to answer, Mother. Ah it says uh more and more I seem to be hearing the question. Isn't it true today that the man rather than the party is receiving the votes, that the two party system is undergoing a gradual change. Do you think this is so?

[ER:] Well I don't believe it can be entirely so for this reason that anybody who gives very serious consideration to this question must realize that no matter how good a man may be, in many positions perhaps not so much in some positions as in others, but in many positions his ability to do a job is conditioned by what his party stands for.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I see your point, but uh-uh would you say really and truly that uh in the last say twenty years since the last war uh that we have voted for parties in elections rather than individuals?

[ER:] Well I don't think uh the two should be completely separated you see. I don't think one should vote for an individual that one does not think uh meets the requirements of a public official just because he runs in the party that one usually um is associated with. But on the other hand um I don't think that you can vote for an individual purely as an individual without regard to the party because if he is a strong individual and the party as a whole has stood for certain things, he can do a great deal with the backing of--really in making the party live up to the best that it usually stands for and therefore from my point of view it is important what party a man, um, is the candidate in, I think I can illustrate it perhaps by um-- (2:39)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Ancient history [Elliot Roosevelt laughs]?

[ER:] Well, we--I don't know whether to take ancient history or-or modern history um take, for instance, um the fact that I think that today there are uh men in the Republican Party who would like very much to make an extremely good record on the question of non-discrimination and yet you find that they have frequently aligned themselves with the reactionary group in the Democratic Party from the South on that very subject um simply because for some reason it was valuable to keep that coalition and therefore uh they were uh forced to do it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, now uh in other words, what you're saying is that uh that they sacrificed uh their principles in order to uh further their ideas and hopes in other directions. In other words, they traded out their vote maybe on the question of discrimination in order to get support for some other measure that they believed in on an entirely unrelated subject. [ER: Yes, yes.] Well now uh sometimes uh even the most liberal people uh in our Congress, most forward looking, have been known to do that uh they've sacrificed some issues that they were for in order to uh further what they considered was more important.

[ER:] Yes, but if they belonged to a party, a--that on the whole kept its objectives in view and was uh trying to attain those objectives it would be only a temporary thing, but this is something we could discuss at greater length and I know you should remember some of our sponsors now.

(Break 4:56-5:01)

[ER:] Well now, Elliott, I'd like to go back to that discussion uh we broke off rather suddenly because um I-I think a good deal more can be said about it. Uh you see we often think of people um --or of parties let us say, as being controlled by bosses um and, therefore, of people uh perhaps not being able to carry out um the things that they actually stand for. I don't think that is of necessity true in all cases, but I do think that it is perhaps truer in the case of the Republican Party which has a stronger organization ah on the overall than the Democrats have -- the Democrats have perhaps a very strong organization in cities but not as strong an organization overall.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, now wait a minute now, just let me interrupt there. Ah you say the Republicans have a stronger organization overall and the Democrats maybe in just cities. But isn't it perfectly true that uh for instance the city organization, Tammany Hall as it's known in New York, uh really controls the majority of the vote in the state of New York.

[ER:] Well, it has the biggest vote and therefore--

[ER and Elliott overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well the same is true in Chicago.

[ER:] Uh, it complements -- I mean it-it counts in the election of a statewide--for statewide offices.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So, so now we're agreed that--

[ER:] But I don't think that of necessity uh it would control a person who is running for a state or national office. (7:00)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright now let's--

[ER:] It would control its city office.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah, alright. Now uh would you say that uh, for instance, going back into ancient history in New York state that Alfred E. Smith was elected governor of the state of New York ah by a city machine that controlled the -- uh was able to roll up a big enough majority time after time and his return and to a certain extent that that applied in the election of-of Father for instance as governor of the state of New York.

[ER:] Yes. Of course it-it does apply but you see when it comes to a statewide official um he is not held in the same way by the city machine. For instance, um it becomes perhaps important to have, as a statewide official, someone whom they cannot control which was the case in Alfred E. Smith and was the case in Father. [Elliott Roosevelt: Alright.] Um they knew they couldn't control them, but they also knew that in order to get some of the people they could control, they better back those people. (8:14)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright, now I've got to come right down to present day ah up in the state of New Hampshire the Republican machine that exists up there ah was quite uh antagonistic to one of its own ah Republican senators, Senator Tobey, and he won his party nomination over the efforts of what would pass as a machine in the state of New Hampshire. No uh doesn't that pretty clearly point out that the Republicans also can nominate people that are not bound by machines.

[ER:] I think it does, and I think it does happen in- in both parties. I would, however, still contend that on the whole where there is a good Republican organization it has a better control. I may be um it may be that um uh it has become less good that I don't know [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] but I go back in to past history. Uh--

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well going back in to past history, you've got to remember that the most powerful single organized machine that exists anywhere in American political life is the hold of the conservative element of the Democratic uh machine group that control all voting in the South.

[ER:] In one locality yes, but I still don't think that they need to control in the country. I still think um that they are weaker than the country as whole. (10:00)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You think that they're weaker than the--than any -- than say the Republican organization?

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] They are weaker uh if--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Certainly win more elections than Republicans [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] They are weaker uh if you really uh want to get together. Not-not if you don't. Now I know that you have something else to talk about.

(Break 10:22-10:27)

[ER:] And now, Mr. Morgan, we'd like to know something about you, did you start from scratch in radio or did you have previous experience in pictures, or on the stage?

[Henry Morgan:] When um I was seventeen ---sixteen or seventeen -- I had a job as a page boy in a local radio station and that ah was my background.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] How long ago was that, Henry? (10:55)

[Elliott Roosevelt and Henry Morgan overlap]

[Henry Morgan:] Well, [Elliott Roosevelt: I don't want--] seventeen from thirty-seven would be twenty years ago but I'm not thirty-six yet so it would be eighteen years ago. [Elliot Roosevelt: Ah ha] Something like that. I don't know what would that be? Thirty-one? I was born in 1915, so I suppose in 1930 I must have been fifteen, and 1931 I must have been sixteen somewhere in there, thirty-one or thirty-two.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh you were in on the early days of radio.

[ER:] You were rather--

[Henry Morgan:] Well, I wasn't in on it. I was uh paid eight dollars a week to run around it but uh [Henry Morgan laughs] nothing much came of that.

[ER:] I imagine you felt glad to have that job around that time.

[Henry Morgan:] In thirty-two yes, uh there weren't many jobs and um I started to go to college at night. I went for two weeks, didn't like it, never went back. I never liked formal education and probably uh I have no regrets yet. Perhaps later [Henry Morgan laughs].

[ER:] Well, I'm interested in that because um uh I know other people who feel that uh they get more education just uh by living and by educating themselves but uh now-a-days sometimes it's a little difficult when people want you to have a formal education.

[Henry Morgan:] Well I feel this way, um if I were an employer and two people came to me, one of whom had a formal education, I would choose him. (12:16)

[ER:] You would choose him?

[Henry Morgan:] Yes. Uh I think it's uh perhaps he-he is no better equipped to do what I would hire him for but ah he has that in case you need it [Henry Morgan and Elliott Roosevelt laugh].

[ER:] Well, evidently you don't feel that you have needed it, and perhaps you never will which is a good thing. Now I would like to know um several more things which I have thought about in thinking of having a chance to talk to you. I know that on some of your funniest sketches um are those which you use dialects such as German, French, British, and so on, and uh you told me about your French but you didn't tell me about your German and um any other language I imagine that you chose to study up. But I'd like to know how you acquired this talent. Because it's hard to talk in a foreign language even briefly um and really do it well. Were you born with it, is it uh a kind of ear that uh just belongs to you, or did you have to work really very hard to acquire the ability to do this?

[Henry Morgan:] Well, I'm afraid that the true answer would not ah be of much benefit to aspiring uh thespians. I'm a mimic and ah you don't uh have to learn to be a mimic you either are or you aren't, I suppose, and I just mimic. (13:50)

[Elliott Roosevelt and Henry Morgan overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, let's hear you mimic.

[Henry Morgan:] I don't know what I'm doing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Let's hear you mimic.

[Henry Morgan:] Well, I have nobody to mimic. [ER laughs] Oh, I'm not the kind of mimic who does people.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I'm not talking about people I'm talking about do, uh, uh, say an old German grocer from the old country.

[Henry Morgan:] How old?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh quite old.

[Henry Morgan:] Has he a wife?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh yes.

[Henry Morgan:] Mhm. Are they happily married?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] No [Henry Morgan and Elliott Roosevelt laugh].

[Henry Morgan:] Any children [Elliott Roosevelt and Henry Morgan laugh]?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh seven or eight.

[Henry Morgan:] It's pretty- pretty difficult to-to mimic mythical people but uh I don't know I do twenty-one dialects. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes] But--

[ER and Henry Morgan overlap]

[ER:] You do twenty-one dialects?

[Henry Morgan:] By my um uh generous count [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]. Some of them are pretty bad, you see.

[ER:] Well that means-- that must mean [Henry Morgan, coughs: Pardon me.] that you could—you can have an Irish accent or a scotch accent [Henry Morgan: Yes.] or um-um several different kinds of-of English accents. (14:46)

[Henry Morgan:] That's true.

[ER:] Can you do uh different parts of the United States?

[Henry Morgan:] I used to be able to.

[ER:] Give me a nice Southern accent.

[Henry Morgan:] Well to tell you the truth I-I used to be able to do that, but I haven't heard anybody for so long that it's very difficult. That's the truth--

[ER:] You have to hear them recently?

[Henry Morgan:] I-I have to hear them. If I've, if I've heard somebody recently, it'd be-be much simpler.

[ER:] That interests me because I have an idea that everybody who has an ear uh unconsciously mimics, and I know that uh years ago uh in my family uh my-my own Roosevelt side of the family there were rather distinctive ways of talking and um Theodore Roosevelt was my father's brother and his two sisters had very distinctive characteristics and whenever the younger people were with them um someone was sure to say to us afterwards, I've had it done to me dozens of times, "Why you talk just like Auntie Corinne" or "You talk just like Auntie Bye," and I hadn't the faintest idea that I was copying at all. And I think that's something that the first place you have to be with someone who impresses you and so that you-you are thinking more or less the way you-you were with them you see and then unconsciously you do it. (16:13)

[ER and Henry Morgan overlap]

[Henry Morgan:] Oh, well everybody learns to-to uh speak originally by mimicking. [ER: By mimicking.] And then they forget. But that's why children very often sound like their parents. You may [ER: But-] have noticed that around here [Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Do you practice a long while before you do a particular stunt of any kind?

[ER, Henry Morgan, and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Henry Morgan:] I happen to be one of the most fantastically lazy people in the world. I practice nothing. I don't like it. [ER: I--] That's work.

[ER:] I-I was told you worked all the time and liked it.

[Henry Morgan:] I work very seldom and abhor it [ER laughs] I think--(16:44)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I don't think that's quite true, I hear you quite a lot.

[ER:] What things, what-what rumors grow up about people [Henry Morgan laughs] [Henry Morgan: You --] I was told you liked it better than anything in the world.

[Henry Morgan:] Oh I don't know who your source was I hope it was someone reputable but eh yes there is a kind of work I like and that's writing but I'm not very good at it uh that's what I'm going into now. I have been um a comedian for a while, that is to say, I mimicked my idea of a comedian and this turned out to be a singularly un-commercially advantageous venture. If that is not English I'll take it back.

[Elliott Roosevelt laughs] A singularly un-advan--no probably isn't. But I like to write and I'm going to-- uh that unfortunately takes work. That's why I don't understand how you do as much of it as you do because it takes me hours to write even some small nonsense (17:35).

[ER:] Well try dictating that won't take you hours. Uh I do most a great deal of my writing by dictation and um if you just write the way you would talk it won't take you long.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh I can assure you that Mother has the formula right down to the nth degree. She gets home at night around midnight and poor Tommy, her secretary, has to stay up until she gets home in order for her to dictate the column.

[ER:] Oh well now mostly I try to do it before, I haven't today but mostly I do it. [ER laughs] I try to do it at a reasonable hour. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes, well--] but I just dictate it and uh it's done in no time.

[Henry Morgan:] Well I have another uh trouble there, you see, I have nothing to say.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh now, come--

[ER:] Nonsense.

[Henry Morgan:] Well, by and large, you know --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well than what do you want to write about?

[Henry Morgan:] Oh dear, I guess I have something to say but um it's very difficult to think of it in nice rounded lucid sentences.

[ER:] Well you-you better do what uh I do just uh gather up as you go through the day um little things that happen and see if out of those you don't always uh get ideas. I do.

[Henry Morgan:] Yes, but I haven't your energy. I can't spend enough time just being awake as you do [ER and Elliott Roosevelt laughs].

[ER:] Oh how that leads me directly to how many hours must you sleep?

[Henry Morgan:] Oh eight, nine, ten, until I get good and tired of it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but when do you go to bed ?

[Henry Morgan:] Oh [Elliott Roosevelt and Henry Morgan laugh].

[ER:] Night life I imagine [ER laughs].

[Henry Morgan:] Well, I'm still in my giddy period.

[ER:] Giddy period yes, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] well that you should be in when you're young. And now I'm going to ask you because um you're going into writing and you know more about um this radio business than I do I'm sure, I wonder if uh you'd think up some good advice for me because when I asked Mr. Fred Allen, earlier in this series, uh he gave me some excellent advice, as I remember it he told me to keep on with what I was doing and um I'd just liked to know what you would advise? (19:50)

[Henry Morgan:] Well, if that is what the Mahatma told you, there's very little I could add. [ER laughs] If Mr. A said keep on with what you're doing that must be the most profound advice anybody could give you.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh well now wait a minute, Mr. Morgan, it seems to me that your number one fan is Mr. Allen and uh he has been very anxious for you to keep on being a comedian and here you are turning into an author.

[Henry Morgan:] Well, I tell you it may be he's my number one fan but these days it may also be he's my one fan.

[Henry Morgan and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh no, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] not at all I, I know two more.

[Henry Morgan:] That's why I'm going in to writing [Henry Morgan laughs].

[ER:] Well, now just before we go off the air just give us a sample of your--some dialect, just a sentence.

[Henry Morgan speaking with a German accent:] Well it's awfully difficult I would really like so much to help you out but I-I-I cannot work unless I have some equipment, some--somebody I could, uh, speak to, or something to read, without it I am dead.

[ER:] Thank you [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] very much, that was wonderful. I've enjoyed our talk so much. Now I think it's Elliott's turn to say something.

(20:57)

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