

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

March 30th, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott respond to a listener's question regarding the necessity of a global fight against communism and the dangers of militarization. In the interview segment, ER discusses an upcoming Peter Paul Rubens art exhibition with Margaret Lewisohn, chairman of the Public Education Association, and Ludwig Burchard, an expert on Rubens's work.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Margaret Lewisohn, Ludwig Burchard

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, our letter today was addressed to me and it comes from the Reverend C. Capuzzi, Francis C. Capuzzi, of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania. And he's written I think a very interesting letter, and I think uh you'll have uh a very interesting time in answering it. Uh He writes: "I listen to uh your mother's program with pleasure, but often she sounds a little evasive in her answers. The other day she admitted that our position is contradictory when we stand uh for the democratic freedom of the countries behind the Iron Curtain, and at the same time we side with those who would suppress freedom in Indonesia and elsewhere. But I don't think that your good mother would admit that such contradiction amounts to hypocrisy.

There are two things which today are puzzling and dismaying millions of Americans. The first is that our vaunted democracy seems unable to inspire men with the aggressive faith with which communism inspires its adherence. Democracy seems to have lost confidence in its ability to hold its own in the clash of ideologies. In its fight against communism it relies less on the weapons of the spirit, uh goodwill, forbearance, meekness, et cetera, or reason, or enlightened propaganda than in armed strength. There are millions who, with ex-President Hoover, think that a great navy and air force plus the atom weapons are quite sufficient for our defense. The fact that we are spending ourselves into bankruptcy by our mammoth armaments naturally engenders the suspicion that we are bent upon offense. And this leads to the other gnawing doubt that America, the erstwhile symbol of peaceableness, may have become what our enemies say she is-she has: incurably war minded and war-like. One can see that if we are to preserve democracy at home, we must help it abroad. But is it not enough to help with our money, much of it squeezed from needy people, and our weapons? Since when has overpopulated Europe become lacking in man power? Are American boys so expendable that they must or can be flung into every dangerous spot in the world? Communism, seemingly the hope of the poor and the hungry across the world, is here to stay, just as capitalistic democracy is here for good. The best -- the only way to overcome the shortcomings of both is to Christianize them, not to plunge them into an atomic cataclysm.

I, who have already seen two supposed victories of democracy, hope I may not see a third one. For I cannot help feeling that another victory will plunge our beloved America into such chaos that we will have our own brand of communism. Not a bit better than the Russian. Believe me with sincere admiration for all the Roosevelts. Sincerely yours, the Reverend Francis C. Capuzzi of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Wind Gap, Pennsylvania." [ER: Well, of course --] Would you care to comment on that? [coughs]

[ER:] Well, I-I think it's so long that you'd have to take it paragraph by paragraph. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] But I'd like to just start on the question of uh Christianizing communism. It can't be done, because the basis of communism is non-Christian. [Elliott Roosevelt: That's right.] And um uh how you are going to take [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] a completely materialistic uh setup-up, which does not believe in any type of spiritual uh background to what anybody does-es and uh Christianize it is beyond my understanding. Now I think it's quite possible that if we live um up to the best in our religion-on, and

through it uh give an example of what a government based on Christianity can accomplish, we may have an effect towards modifying uh the success of communism, but to --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You mean modifying the success of communism or the form of communism?

[ER:] M-modifying uh what might be called the apparent success of communism to spread among miserable people-le. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] That success is brought about largely by the fact that where people are hungry, they are more interested in where they get their next meal than they are in freedom or even in a belief in God. If people offer them their next meal, they're going to accept that doctrine whatever it may be. If it happens to be the Christians who offer it to them, why, that's all to the good. One of our real troubles is that democracy moves slowly. I was given one of the best examples of uh what happens in a poor country. A certain country, a very poor country, where the people -- not-the upper group is very well off, but where the people are extremely poor-- um asked us for a loan and I think in time they will probably get that loan. But it goes um -- and I am not quite sure whether it's a loan from us, or from the Export-Import Bank, but in any case they have asked help from us in the past, and we have uh a great many interests in their country, so it is likely that eventually uh we will try to help in certain ways. But in the meantime, they entered into an agreement with Russia and that agreement provided that Russia should furnish them with certain foodstuffs. Russia had the ships all loaded and within two weeks of the time the agreement was signed, the food was actually in that country and the people were getting it.

Now that turned the feeling of the masses who actually got something in their hands to a feeling that Russia was better than the United States and that communism was better than democracy eh. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Now uh I'm not giving you the name of the country because I don't know um how much as yet is actually settled, but this part is settled: that people there in that country are turning towards communism because they had a demonstration of how quickly it acted. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Now they also um are doing something which is quite interesting in the way of propaganda. You know uh the Russians use key people in countries very largely. They take um citizens of the country and indoctrinate them well and they send them back to do the type of thing that they want done. And one of the things in this country that they have been doing is to give little street plays, and plays in country villages depicting the sorrows of the people, the poverty conditions, the difficult conditions, and then the USSR comes to the rescue with food.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm, yes. Well of course that is uh -- I happen to know which country you're talking about, but I think it uh that in the instance of that country uh it is a very significant thing that private American industry has been desirous of going in to the aid of that country, uh but because of a-of lack of ability on the part of uh the United States and Great Britain to get together on a policy together uh and to stop squabbling over who's going to have these natural resources and so forth that this country has, the net result has been that the private capital interests have been forced to retire from that country's picture uh where they were really going in to help their fundamental economy ah because uh they were unable to have any support from our country's government, and the British government was definitely fighting them and promoting discord amongst the different elements o-of that government.

[ER:] Well I didn't happen to know that but that's only one point in the letter. Now um I was not conscious that I'd ever said we were supporting um the wrong elements in Indonesia, I have thought that we were -- uh that Indonesia was going along very uh well, on course.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] No but uh originally-wuh-uh originally we-we did not help Indonesian people in their struggle for independence following the Second World War--

[ER:] I think the gentleman has really missed the point of what I said on our difficulties in Asia. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Uh I said that it would be the normal and natural thing to expect the United States to help all people who were wanting freedom, who were trying to gain their own freedom, but that in Asia it

was complicated for us in some cases by the fact that the USSR had also seen uh these leanings and strivings for freedom, [Elliott Roosevelt: Right.] um had infiltrated, and, therefore, we were faced with -- if we help the group that was striving for freedom, we might also put communism in the saddle in that country. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] So we sometimes found ourselves supporting a reactionary group simply because it was against communism. And that the moment our s-main struggles seemed to be against communism. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] Now, that's uh an unfortunate position to be in, but it's one that we as a nation must understand and-and must see uh the reason for, and I think it should act as a spur to us to help materially wherever there is misery in the world. Because the more we reduce misery the less uh communism has a chance to grow.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, now I see that we have very little time left for this part of the program, but can I get two quick answers to two of these questions: uh one, the fact that we're spending ourselves into bankruptcy uh indicates that we are bent upon uh offense.

[ER:] That's nonsense, perfect nonsense. We must be strong and we must also not uh lend ourselves to Mr. Hoover's idea of a um citadel in this country eh. Uh if we do, we're lost. We must uh stay strong uh militarily, and not use it except for peace. Now I believe our people can do that, but there may be people who don't believe it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right, now one other quick one and then we have to go off this part of the program. uh The question of sending American troops, American boys, to Europe when Am -- overpopulated Europe has so much man power.

[ER:] Uh, the gentleman has forgotten that Europe was invaded and conquered and that um they are not as yet recovered, and therefore they do need support and leadership. [Elliott Roosevelt: Right.] And they are not capable of doing it without some sense of initiative and support from us.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh I think that answers this gentleman's letter quite adequately. I'm afraid we have to go on so now we will turn it over to our announcer.

[Break 13:11 -13:21]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Today Mrs. Roosevelt has two guests who will discuss both an outstanding art exhibit and public education. Mother, will you take over and make the introductions, please?

[ER:] Gladly. One of my quest's today is an old friend whom I'm happy to welcome. Mrs. Samuel A. Lewisohn, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Public Education Association. Mrs. Lewisohn.

[Margaret Lewisohn:] Mrs. Roosevelt, it's a great pleasure to be on your program again, and it is also uh extremely fortunate for us that we have this opportunity to tell people in New York about an exhibition which is going to run at the Wildenstein Gallery, an exhibition of the great masterpieces of [Peter Paul] Rubens's art which will run at the Wildenstein Gallery from the twenty-first of February until the thirty-first of March.

[ER:] Well no one should miss that exhibition, so I'm particularly glad to have another visitor with us today who comes from England, Dr. Ludwig Burchard, the greatest living authority on the Flemish master Rubens. Dr. Burchard.

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes, I came to this country and I came for the first time to help to bring together this beautiful exhibition from [coughs] some of the finest pictures in the world which have come to America, and in doing the catalogue work, giving descriptions and telling the history of the different pictures and

how they are connected with his life and activity, and we did it in a weeks' time, the catalogue is ready and will be with fully illustrated thirty-five pictures, everything illustrated and very complete catalogue, and I hope everybody will enjoy it-it as something spectacular.

[ER:] Oh, I think that sounds wonderful, it's not only -- we'll have a chance to see these pictures, which we might not ordinarily have seen because they are in-- many of them scattered all over the country, but we will have as something we can keep in this catalogue. I think that's perfectly wonderful. Well now first of all, Mrs. Lewisohn, I would like you to tell our listeners about the exhibit, which is being sponsored by the Public Education Association, giving us a little more in detail what you are planning to do.

[Margaret Lewisohn:] I think, Mrs. Roosevelt, uh the reason that the Public Education Association for many years has put on a series of art exhibitions of fine quality is because it uh thinks that art education is an important part of public education for all Americans, and that to learn to see great pictures is important indeed. A secondary reason, I think, is that it helps our organization financially to do those things towards improving public education which we are so eager to do and which you as a member of whom we are so proud of many years standing have helped us many times to do in improving the public schools.

[ER:] Of course um I do know something about the Public Education Association, or the PEA as so many people call it, and I am a member. And uh -- so I'm very happy eh to have you talk a little bit about that organization. It does help to improve the public schools, but just how?

[Margaret Lewisohn:] I think the answer to that is that uh it helps in a variety of ways, Mrs. Roosevelt. It helps through publications of surveys and of studies, to it-point the way towards the best in education, it helps through demonstrations, and you were closely connected with the all-day neighborhood schools.

[ER:] Oh yes, I remember well going to see it!

[Margaret Lewisohn:] I remember taking uh the subway with you up to the Harlem school with a great deal of pleasure, and I remember how you inspired the parents at that school. Uh that-the-that was an experiment which now the Board of Education has taken over and has spread to four schools where children can stay for a longer period of time, uh have a richer curriculum, uh more trips around uh-the count-uh-the country and the city, uh and acquire a somewhat richer education. Uh, in addition to that uh we are trying to arouse a giant, which is New York City, in an interest in their schools. That's easy to do in a small community; it's extremely difficult to do in a city the size of New York, as you well know. [ER:] Oh. [chuckles]] At the moment I think you would be interested, and I am hoping someday you will have the time to go up to the Bronx Park community and see a hundred thousand people whom we are now working with, trying to interest them in their local schools to get away from the idea that an individual cannot, in a big city, help his schools. Because he can.

[ER:] Well that's interesting because I think the making people conscious of their individual responsibility is one of the important things in a democracy, and yet one of the most difficult things to teach people. How di-how did you come to start the PEA?

[Margaret Lewisohn:] I think it's rather interesting too, Mrs. Roosevelt, that in 1895, I think it was, some fifty-six years ago, a group of women dedicated to improving their city got together over their teacups and decided that they would like to do something about their schools. And they started, and they did. They put in the first parents' association, the first recreation center, the first social worker in the schools, and then the school m -- this idea of better schools grew. More people got interested, and today we are a board of twenty-six private citizens, men and women, who are continuing towards that goal which was dedicated so long ago.

[ER:] If I remember right-rightly, Natalie Swan was one of those early people, do you remember some of the others?

[Margaret Lewisohn:] Indeed she was. Uh Miss -- uh Natalie Swan was one, Mrs. [Mariana Griswold] Van Rensselaer was another, uh Miriam Sutro Price was another, um I-I'm afraid I have not got the rest of them.

[ER:] You're a good group, you see, that got together, it depends on who gets together at the start, I think, whether an idea grows. And I think you were a very good group that started that. Well now I think I would to come back and uh to talk for a minute to Dr. Burchard. He said -- you said just a few minutes ago that this was your first trip to this country.

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes I am ashamed, it is my first one. [clears throat]

[ER:] Well I'm very glad that you've come over, and I hope that you're finding it um an interesting trip.

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes, I enjoyed it very much indeed and --

[ER:] And are you finding more interest in um your particular work and in the arts generally than you had expected to find?

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes, I saw so many museums and in every town growing on, buying, and -- These new exhibitions are I could hardly see a little bit of it, what is going on in this country with the pictures and paintings.

[ER:] Well -- now are most of these paintings in this special exhibit uh that we're all I hope going to see at the Wildenstein Gallery, is um -- are most of this paintings coming from museums in the east? Do you know?

[Ludwig Burchard:] No -- only part comes from museums. Several of the museums are not prepared to lend, like Philadelphia, Johnson Collection, or Mrs. Cardinal's collection. But here from New York we got splendid exhibits from the Metropolitan Museum, and the other muse--they are all over the country. Even in the west they are lending paintings, one comes from California, from San Francisco, *The Tribute Money* also is come from Denver, and--

[ER:] Uh, do any come out of private collections?

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes, quite a lot private paintings. Not very important ones, but I hope fine ones inimitable by the master himself.

[ER:] That's very interesting I didn't know that this country was -- had so many Rubens paintings. I'm quite surprised. Um I'm going to ask you a very foolish question, just how long ago did Rubens live?

[Ludwig Burchard:] It is over 300 years that he died, in 1640. Now 310 that he died. [Ludwig Burchard clears throat]

[ER:] In 1640 then? [Ludwig Burchard: 1640. Mm.] -- And forty, I see. Um I wonder if you can tell me a little bit more about him as a person, I'm sure you do it in the catalogue and I think it will interest people on the air to know a little more about him. At first uh did he, like so many other artists, starve in a garret?

[Ludwig Burchard:] No, he was very prosperous from the beginning, and he was in the proper and decent way, a good businessman. Part of being an artist and diplomat. He --

[ER:] He was a diplomat?

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes, he -- he's come twice as an ambassador, first to Spain in [16]'29, and in '29 he moved to London as a temporary ambassador before the permanent ambassad-ambassador came from Madrid. And since his early years, since 1610, he was always in dip-employed in diplomatic correspondence with the prime minister of Spain, [Gaspar de Guzman] Olivares, and helping [Ambrosio] Spinola's actual leader of the Netherlands in diplomatic missions. And he was a man of peace, great protector and defender of peace, and he -- his aim was to bring peace between the Protestant part of the Netherlands and the S-Spanish part of the southern country. [ER: Oh, that --] But the end it was -- it doesn't happen to be -- it was too old-fashioned, the separation was definite, and so he resigned from politics for his later years. Married the second time his young wife and retired only to painting. But he was very active in diplomatic matters for his time.

[ER:] But he really did a good deal of painting uh as he went 'round on um diplomatic trips, didn't he? For instance uh I think it's in Whitehall, isn't it, in London [Ludwig Burchard: Yes, yes.] there are some beautiful paintings. Ceilings. [clears throat]

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes. Those were too big to be painted in London itself and he made only sketches, and when he came back to Antwerp he painted these huge canvases, [ER: Oh my.] which were the on-which are the only decorative panels by rooms which still are on their original place. [ER: That's --] But during the war, during the second war, they were taken back when bombing started, of course, and now they are replaced to the ceiling. And that is quite interesting because it speaks for the calmness of the English that they are replacing these enormous canvases to their original places, thirty fe-feet height of a cer -- and they are very difficult to be removed; they had to cut them-the larger ones to separate panels to take them out of the windows, but now they've been cleaned and sewn together and are replaced one after the other.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] Well that speaks well for the fact that they don't have the jitters --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, [ER: Yes, Elliott] do you mind if I interrupt this very interesting uh discussion about Rubens to uh turn the program over to our announcer and then we'll return right away.

[Break 26:03 -26:16]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now, Mother, we will return our -- to our interview of today, and uh will you please take over again on the program?

[ER:] I certainly will, and I'm coming back for a minute to Mrs. Lewisohn, I want to know how the Public Education Association uh had the happy thought of bringing Dr. Burchard over here?

[Margaret Lewisohn:] It was a combination of a s -- we knew that Rubens was a man who has uh -- is one of the great artists of the world, and has had imitators, has been helped by other artists and we wanted to make sure that this Rubens exhibition would be an exhibition of his available masterpieces in America painted by Rubens, and we knew there was only one man who could give us that information. We knew it was a man who had spent his entire life as a scholar studying Rubens, and that was Dr. Burchard. And we were fortunate enough with-the-- thanks to the Wildenstein gallery between us to persuade him to come

over here and put on this exhibition which we believe is unique, because this kind of an exhibition has not been held in America before of Rubens's work.

[ER:] No, I think it's a very remarkable opportunity that you're offering; you're doing a-a double thing, really, you're helping the Public Education Association, but you're also giving a remarkable artistic opportunity to the people of this country. I should think it was something that people would travel a long ways to see. And --

[Margaret Lewisohn:] And that's why we're so grateful to be on this program [ER chuckles] because we feel perhaps they may after listening to you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Well -- now, Dr. Burchard I-I want to ask you something because you said that it showed how calm Great Britain was in putting back these great paintings. Uh do you find uh more anxiety here than you found in uh Great Britain?

[Ludwig Burchard:] I can -- [clears throat] Only seen that Great Britain's are very calm and quiet, and papers are not full of excitement about things which will happen. Though this might be the English education and character to-to be a little bit silent and not very talkative, and you feel practically nothing of the anxieties. But --

[ER:] Well I think that's uh-that's a very interesting observation. Um I wonder if you can now, in-in the short time that remains, give us an estimate of your uh -- from your background of very profound study eh of what makes Rubens art uh so important to us all?

[Ludwig Burchard:] Uh quite a lot of modern painting very much admired this all-new combination of forms, circles, and distribution of colors. But he is a man of -- one of the last great artists was interested in the subject on the identity between subject and formalism. He was -- he believed in kings, in subordinates, in so -- in religious duties, in amusement and enjoyment of life, and everything had its proper scale and proper distribution. And his humanity expanded over all the activities and possibilities of men. But his pictures, they've always a subject and sometimes a complicated subject, not only from Biblical text, but from antique mythology, and he's a great master in telling stories. In the way he makes the principle point available to everybody and to subordinate all details which are -- and-and which are giving more sense to the central subject. And this makes him a man of hopes for the future of modern painting and -- because he's --- [ER: It would --] yes -- He is at the same time --

[ER:] It would make him intellectually interesting then [Ludwig Burchard: Yes.] as well as um purely interesting to the painter. It would make him interesting um because of the content of the picture and what you had to look for in it, as well as um just because his color was beautiful or his technique was good, wouldn't it?

[Ludwig Burchard:] Yes.

[ER:] That's --

[Margaret Lewisohn:] Mrs. Roosevelt, I also think that the thing that Rubens has -- and this is not a scholar speaking, because he's spoken, [ER: Yes.] this is a layperson -- seems to me is his gaiety, his-his love of life which is something that today people need so desperately. [Margaret Lewisohn and ER overlap] And I think Dr. Burchard --

[ER:] That's true, he was very gay. In-in so many of his paintings there is a gaiety and a and a-and a-a liveliness about --

[Margaret Lewisohn:] Profoundness! And he has the same energetic and vital quality, if I might be allowed to say so, but in a totally different way you have. But he had a sense of life, I think, Dr. Burchard, [Ludwig Burchard: Yes.] that-that um is the reason that people who don't know too much about art still react so strongly to it.

[ER:] And still enjoy his-his paintings because of that quality of-of being alive and loving life. That's an important thing at present [someone coughs] to bring, I think, to the public. And I think that um that would be um very um valuable thing in calming what I call um our excitements over many things which Dr. Burchard said don't appear in the-- in um Great Britain to the same extent that they appear here. I-I suppose the reason they must appear here to a certain extent is that we are obliged to make people aware of what they have to do about them, whereas in Great Britain they have kept to so many of their um obligations ever since the last war, they've never come to an end. And therefore um it's been a little easier to continue on um with an accentuation of what they had done. So that I-I imagine that is-is part of the difference, because here you have to make people aware again and uh that's a little bit difficult.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, I wonder if we could get Dr. Burchard to uh give a description of some of the great paintings that will be in this ex-exhibit. Uhh --

[ER:] Yes, perhaps he could just mention --

[Ludwig Burchard:] I just mentioned the picture of *The Tribute Money*, which [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes?] is now in San Francisco. It is Christ being asked if they should pay to the -- their tribute in money, or if is religious sects are free not to pay, and he is saying they have to pay and the participation of the different heads from indifference to really deep interest -- this one masterpiece of characterization and all painted by himself, just I think really marvelous painting to be looked carefully at it.

[ER:] Very carefully, did that come out of the Huntington collection? Or what collection does that come out of?

[Ludwig Burchard:] This is the De Young Memorial Collection, [ER: Oh yes.] quite a recent-uh recent collection, and they are buying now very important paintings. From the Metropolitan Museum comes here late mythological subject: Venus is asking Adonis, her lover, not to go to the chase but he's going eh to his fatal chase, big life-size canvas, very gay and very clear in color. Sent from Sarasota come *Pausias and Glycera*, a little bit out-of-mode story of the painter Pausias who painted his lover, Glycera, who-who invented the garlands of flowers, and it is a combined work of Rubens and the specialist of flower paintings, Jan Brueghel. An enormous canvas, life-size, [ER: Oh, that's --] I haven't seen it since it has been cleaned. It was awfully dirty when I saw it in Westminster, in Duke of Westminster's housing.

[ER:] Well I didn't know that Sarasota owned that. And now I'm sorry to say our time is almost uh coming to an end.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, I'm afraid you must bring p-this part of the program to an end.

[ER:] Well I hate to have to do it, but I want to thank you Mrs. Lewisohn and you Dr. Burchard for coming on the program to tell us about this exhibition, and I hope that many, many people will hear this broadcast and see the exhibition.

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The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project