

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the living conditions of Jews in Russia. In the interview segment, ER's guest is Oscar Ewing, the United States Federal Security Administrator.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Oscar Ewing

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

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, I will thank you. It's a pleasure to welcome Mr. Oscar Ewing to the program today. As United States Federal Security Administrator, the responsibilities of his position reach every person who is listening to this program. I know you're going to find Mr. Ewing's discussion well worth hearing, when Mrs. Roosevelt introduces him a little later on in the program. Now we're going to hear from the sponsors who make it possible for us to have this recorded program. As soon as we come back, we've been asked to talk about what is happening to the Jewish people in Russia.

[Break 00:58-1:05]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] The letter we have for discussion today, Mother, is uh based on a statement I made at one time. Mrs. Mimi Siegel of the Bronx says "Dear Mrs. Roosevelt, I wish to tell you that I enjoy and appreciate your programs. In these troublesome times, I seem to be buffeted about by opinions of people of high influence. When I hear a statement from people like your son, especially when you seem to argue, I take it as true. Even so it seems to me that at times even truth seems to need backing up. This is my problem. Now not many programs ago, your son in discussing Russia in connection with the Mrs. [Anna M.] Rosenberg investigation and communism in America stated that in Russia Jews are living in ghetto conditions akin-akin to those of Hitler Germany. When I passed this statement on to some others, it seemed to me to be shrugged off in utter disbelief. I would therefore be very grateful if you would point out to me the source of information on this statement. I want very much to have more information with which to illustrate this argument." That's the letter and I suppose maybe I should explain a little bit--

[ER:] I think you better explain, because I think I have heard that statement made by um uh members of the uh Joint Distribution Committee. But um I wouldn't be sure just where I heard it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh the-- I don't remember using those exact words that uh Jews in Russia live in ghetto-like conditions, but I did make the statement I believe uh that Jews in Russia are discriminated against. Uh the basis for my statement is the fact that in the Soviet Union, there is a state that has been set up uh called uh Birobidjan, which is way over on the eastern part of Siberia, and that state was set up to be exclusively a Jewish uh republic. And uh they segregated the Jews into that republic. It was the Soviet Union's intention to uh keep uh Jews from the comp-competition of the rest of the people of the Soviet-- of the rest of the races and creeds of the Soviet Union. And uh it is quite significant that there are, to my knowledge, practically no uh members of the uh Jewish religion who are holding high office in the Soviet government today. Uh some years ago, there were quite a number of Jewish people uh who occupied very high positions in the Soviet government, but they have all been liquidated uh and have-or have been replaced in public office, and today uh-uh uh Jewish uh person in high political position or as a member of the communist party is practically unknown. There are one or two, but they have uh-- I believe even the one or two that I'm familiar with have been replaced.

[ER:] Well, the only-the only addition that I could make to that was that I think it is um quite uh well known that um Jews are trying to leave the USSR um and to go to Israel or to other countries. That could be verified by asking either the United Jewish Appeal or the Joint Distribution Committee or any of those that work in Europe um what their experience has been, because I'm quite sure that there are people who've worked for instance with the ORT in different countries who have actual experience, and could give chapter and verse on what they have found.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I think another interesting uh-uh-uh sidelight on this whole question of the attitude of the Soviet Union toward uh the Jewish people, is that they have refused to allow any of their nationals who desire to immigrate to uh Israel uh to leave and go to uh Israel to their homeland or even to get out to pay a visit. Uh so that uh they are keeping a very close watch to see that nobody gets out telling what the lot of the Jews uh is in the Soviet Union. [ER: Mhm] Uh I think as long as we're discussing the subject of the Soviet Union's treatment of uh various races and creeds that we might uh explain that uh-uh there is quite a lot of agitation that uh goes on from certain people, notably Mr. Paul Robeson, uh as to the wonderful equality that there is in the Soviet Union, and he points to the treatment that he had in the Soviet Union, and uh-uh it's quite amusing to me because I don't think that there are uh more than five or ten Negroes in the whole Soviet Union so that it cannot be too much of a problem to them over there to deal with that problem.

[ER:] I -- yeah, uh I've heard that. I've always heard that [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] um quite naturally the Robesons being cultivated people were treated as such and on an equality basis, which they should have been, which they should be here. Um but uh that it was no criterion of the equality of all races because there were so few uh colored people that they couldn't constitute a problem [Elliott Roosevelt: No] area.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Then uh- then uh we might as well also deal with the subject of religion in the Soviet Union, uh because of course a basic tenet of communism is their disbelief in religion as such. (8:01)

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] Well as I understand [Elliott Roosevelt: coughs] that, there is today no real effort uh to keep the churches closed. Most of the churches are Greek Orthodox as I understand it, but even the uh--there is quite a large number I think of--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I'd like to uh I'd like to correct you there.

[ER:] Really? Oh, I thought that--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Because it isn't Greek Orthodox, it's the Russian Orthodox Church--

[ER:] Russian Orthodox Church? I thought that was--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Which is a different church from the Greek Orthodox.

[ER:] Is it really? Well, I'm very--that's very interesting. Well, I'll um-- I understand that they now allow those churches and their uh priests to uh conduct services and to function uh as long as they say nothing about political subjects. (8:53)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That is correct. As you may recall, I -- uh during the seven weeks that I was in the Soviet Union in nineteen hundred and forty-six, um I made uh quite an investigation of the uh freedom of religion in the Soviet Union. And they made quite a point of telling me that the uh government does not frown on religion as such. I asked uh a young man who was a member of the Young Communists, which

is a sort of preparatory uh, organization to becoming a full-fledged member of the Communist Party. As you know, practically nobody in uh high office or in uh control of anything in the Soviet Union uh gets there without being a member of the Communist Party. In order to be a member of the party, you have to give up religion, uh and uh most al-all communists have uh- uh subscribed to the theory that there is no such thing as uh a god and that they live by what they call the materialism principle. Uh and uh it is to a certain extent uh true that they have given up religion, but I noticed that when I went into a church in the state of Georgia, I was accompanied by uh several members of the Communist Party and uh-I gave some money to the priest to have a prayer given uh for my- for Father and uh-uh out of the group of communists, not one of them failed to go up surreptitiously after me and uh give some money to the priest for a prayer to be given for some member of their own family. And uh then they all came around and said of course we don't believe in this, but uh my mother is a member of the church, or my grandmother is a member of the church, or whoever it was that they were having a prayer said for. So that uh still the-the influence of the church is still felt even though they have foregone [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] it--

[ER:] They do also as I understand permit other religions to function, for instance the Baptists, but always under the--I suppose they permit the Roman Catholics to function.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, the Roman Catholic Church has been to a large extent stamped out, and during the last war uh they did uh state that they tried and executed a number of Catholic --Roman Catholic priests, particularly in the Ukraine, uh as a traitors. So that um they did um I suppose uh lessen the influence of the Roman Catholic religion considerably during the last war.

[ER:] But it's always under the same restrictions, isn't it? That you must not talk on political--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh absolutely, and the-and the church, all churches, are strictly run and controlled by the government. The government has a special ministry for dealing with the churches. I'm afraid that's all that we can discuss on this subject right now, and we have to go on to another part of the program.

[Break 12:30-12:34]

[ER:] My guest today is Mr. Oscar Ewing, United States Federal Security Administrator. That means that Mr. Ewing is at the head of the government office embodying the United States Public Health Service, the United States Office of Education, the Food and Drug Administration, Social Security Administration, the Children's Bureau, and Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation. And that means Mr. Ewing is a very busy person, and we are fortunate that he was able to be here today. I'm so glad you could come, Mr. Ewing, back to your own home town.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, I'm delighted to be here, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Of all the parts of our government, the agency you head, Mr. Ewing, is most concerned with people's health and welfare and with the education of their children. I suppose that means it touches the lives of every one of us.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, literally every man, woman, and child. Uh all of those uh activities that you mentioned in one way or another affect everyone.

[ER:] Of course they would, there's um there's nothing that comes closer than your um-- the work of-of your administration because under one or the other of these headings almost everything we do uh eh touches your work.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, in the health field our research work there is done for the benefit of everyone, our Office of Education touches directly or indirectly the life of every child in the country almost. Uh Social Security is doing uh an excellent job for older people uh on the programs that your husband initiated, and uh of course uh--

[ER:] Well, I've always thought that food and drugs was pretty important to all of us, [Oscar Ewing: Well--] because I can remember seeing some exhibitions when I was in Washington of what could happen if you didn't have that administration.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, indeed, and of what you might eat or some medicine you might take if they weren't trying to keep them pure for everyone; getting them not only pure of things but uh honest weights.

[ER:] It-it all adds up to a tremendous job. And I expect our human resources are just about as important in the present emergency as our supplies of oil and uranium and other military resources.

[Oscar Ewing:] Oh, that is definitely true because uh without the uh human resources, these others mean nothing. Uh health alone is tremendously important in a time of emergency because uh absenteeism cuts down production uh as well as uh if you have bad health it's more difficult to-to find the people for your armed forces and all of that. In every way the health is tremendously important.

[ER:] Uh so that um uh your-your human element is um and is -- has to be thought of in an emergency and say not only from what has to be provided for the actual military purposes, but what has to be provided at home in the way of um of human beings to carry on the daily work of the nation.

[Oscar Ewing:] Absolutely, absolutely.

[ER:] Well, I expect that one of the things that you didn't mention just now but that I did mention in my introduction [ER coughs] is of importance too in this um particular emergency, because a great many physically handicapped persons would be able to take defense jobs as the result of the efforts of the states and the Federal government in vocational rehabilitation, and that's one of your particular uh--

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, that's one of our most active uh bureaus and they've done a marvelous job. Last year they uh put over seventy thousand people on jobs who before that had been uh well virtually on relief, most of them, and that is one of the best-paying activities in the government. Actually, our figures show that uh the-the people that have been rehabilitated, that for every dollar of federal money that has gone into their rehabilitation over a period of years they have paid back in the form of income taxes. More than ten dollars, well you don't often get a ten to one return. (17:39)

[ER and Oscar Ewing overlap:] [ER coughs] No that's a really quite an extraordinary um uh actual return. Usually um it's intangibles that you get back with so many um [Oscar Ewing: This is actually--] of the programs. This is something--

[Oscar Ewing:] Because most of them are literally taken off of relief, they cease to be burdens to their families and to the community and become producers and it does so much for them spiritually and uh their own morale.

[ER:] Well I-I think people would like to know who is in charge in your department of this particular uh activity?

[Oscar Ewing:] Mrs. uh Mary [E.] Switzer is--

[ER and Oscar Ewing:] Oh, Mary Switzer is [Oscar Ewing: Yes.] in charge. Oh I know her.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, she's a grand person.

[ER:] Now what is Jean [M.] Hoey in charge of?

[Oscar Ewing:] She is in the Social Security Administration and in charge of public assistance. She's--

[ER:] Oh public assistance?

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes.

[ER:] Oh, I see. Um what is Ellen Woodward in charge of?

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, she's in uh charge--she's in my own office and uh deals with our international relations. We have a great deal more of that than you would imagine because uh- uh we have to uh we have uh attachés in various of our foreign embassies.

[ER:] Yes, I was interested to find that last time I was abroad. I wanted to know a certain conditions in different countries, and I found that some of your attachés were the best informed on how people lived and what was being done in the government for certain situations that were perhaps similar to what might be here though on a very different scale um of almost any of the people in the embassy.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, they would-- that would be- would be expected for the simple reason that that's their particular line of-of inquiry and that is why they're there to keep us informed of those things, because it's very important that we ah get the benefit of the experience of other countries in these things to compare our own accomplishments and sometimes our own failures.

[ER:] Well, I of course always look in any new country at what they've done. I thought in the Scandinavian countries, where I was last summer, that um we might learn something from some of the housing for the aged. I thought that was very well done.

[Oscar Ewing:] Very well done. (20:06)

[ER:] And there were- there were things here and there that I thought would be valuable to us, and that's why I was so interested to find your people knew so much about them. [Oscar Ewing: Yes.] Because that must come back to you [Oscar Ewing: Oh it does.] and be useful in the department.

[Oscar Ewing:] It does indeed.

[ER:] Well now, uh I want to come back to this defense thing and uh the use that's been made of-of human beings at present. I expect a great many of our older people will be needed in defense jobs uh or in other jobs vacated by younger people going into more active defense work um what um uh what happens, do you help those older people to get to work?

[Oscar Ewing and ER overlap:] Well no, uh that is done by the employment service which is operated by the states but under the general uh the uh Department of Labor has the direct contact with the state operations area there. The-the thing however is this: um wherever you get a tight labor market, be it caused by an emergency such as we have or just simply an overflow of prosperity, uh then the uh tendency is to go into uh the older groups for more workers and uh also into the younger groups, taking the children out of schools earlier than they should. [ER: Now that's bad.] Oh it is, definitely. But they

also go into the older groups and then when the labor market begins to soften, those are the two groups generally that suffer the first; that uh are let out the first. Of course, we found uh very definitely that one of the most tragic things in this country is this definite retirement age--compulsory retirement at a specific time. (21:58)

[ER:] Well, I'm interested to have you say that because I get a great many letters from people who cannot understand, first of all, why they have to be retired when they're still in perfect health, and then from people who are not yet at retiring age but who can't find jobs because they're considered too old to work.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, the people won't take them on for fear they'll have to pay them pensions or something of the kind. It really is a very tragic situation on the whole and uh uh the last summer at the request of the president, I called a conference on the aging, which was held in Washington. [ER: Yes, I remember I couldn't come. I wanted to come.] And uh they really did a very good job of focusing attention on the uh various problems and really pinpointing the problems so that they could be dealt with and we're following that up as best uh we can. A lot can be done. Uh oh there-- the with our aging population that is I mean with the fact that the population in the United States is getting older every year--

[ER:] Yes, where we help them to live longer that's what--

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, and then abandon them, and-and that just isn't right.

[ER:] And then what we do is keep the old rules, which were perhaps possible rules when they were uh dying much earlier than they die today and deteriorating much earlier, [Oscar Ewing: Of course so.] and then they deteriorate. And it's one thing to keep those rules um when that's um what happens to people. It's quite a different thing when they really want to go on being useful members of society.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, those --the compulsory retirement age got its big impetus during the depression, because the industry wanted to find a mechanism to get people out as much as possible, and it developed then and became hard and fast in so many places, and it's very unfortunate because it's a waste of talents for the country, for manpower in a time like this, and really is a uh is-is prodigal and unfortunate in many ways.

[ER:] It's a very unfortunate thing. Well now, I find that we have to stop for just a minute and let our announcer have a word, and then we'll come right back to this discussion.

[Break 24:18-24:24]

[ER:] Now we come back to the discussion with Mr. Oscar Ewing, who is head of the um it's a very long name but we have to remember it, The United States Federal Security Administration, I think that's a quite a long title to carry around. Now I want to come back and ask you about the old people who are really too old and too ill to work and whose incapacity is a permanent thing. What uh do you do for them?

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, [ER coughs] in our uh the Public Health Service, in its research, uh is directing a great deal of that work to-to the study of uh the diseases that uh are afflicting the aged population more, that is: heart disease, the kidney diseases, uh the uh the um high blood pressure, and-and things of that kind. Because uh in a way we pretty well wiped out the diseases of childhood: diphtheria, scarlet fever and the things that were uh so devastating years ago in children. But very little progress has been made in these other diseases, cancer and all of that, and- and uh the research that we're doing there is I'm sure one of the most uh valuable things that our agency does.

[ER:] Now is that under the Public Health Service?

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes.

[ER:] And who is head of the Public Health Service?

[Oscar Ewing:] Uh Dr. Leonard Sheely.

[ER and Oscar Ewing overlap:] Oh yes, I remember talking to him before he went to a World Health uh meeting once, [Oscar Ewing: Yes] on some of the problems that we have that dovetail with the world uh problems.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, yes.

[ER:] And um you do a great deal of research as well in -- not only in sort of uh sanitation work but in the diseases that attack the aged, and that attack children, all that sort of thing?

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, there have been a great forward step taken in the last few years, and Congress really has been very generous on the whole. I suppose never as generous as we wish it were, but uh actually uh we have now at Bethesda, Maryland, the Institutes of Health. I think there are six or seven of them: there's the Cancer Institute, the Heart Institute, the Dental Institute, uh well I forget uh the uh others, but in those we do a certain amount of uh actual research work ourselves there within our own laboratories, but that is a relatively small part. The much the larger part are grants that we make to individual researchers. [ER: Oh yes.] Uh he may be a university professor, he may be uh working at some hospital, or uh anyone who comes in with uh --

[ER:] So you might I suppose make a grant to a school [Oscar Ewing: Oh, indeed] that's doing a special thing [Oscar Ewing: Oh yes] like uh Yale School of Medicine or [ER coughs] Columbia or whatever it might be that was doing a special--

[Oscar Ewing:] By and large, we make it to the individual who carry on the research [ER coughs] the particular research job. Uh those uh grants are passed upon by an advisory board that's very carefully selected, and uh I really think it's one of the finest things the government's doing. Take uh this uh some of our new blood work uh that's uh being done, that came out of our Institutes of Health. The blood-- uh some of the blood plasmas and the substitutes for that, uh and some of our cancer research that they've done have been great uh forward steps and--

[ER:] Well, I think uh I think all that is very valuable; it's valuable to the nation as a whole. Now you mentioned a little while ago the conference that you had held on the aging and I think that we did a very good job also in the [Midcentury] White House Conference on Children and Youth. I know you were interested in that because that came under one of the groups, I think in your, department [Oscar Ewing: Yes.] too.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, the Children's Bureau uh were the ones who uh were the moving active force in that--

[ER:] And that's under Miss Katharine Lenroot ?

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, I was chairman of that uh conference, presided at most of the meetings and they really did a great job. Of course, our uh Children's Bureau are uh a group of eager beavers anyhow, and they uh are completely possessed of the idea that the work among children is the most important work in the world, and they're perfectly willing to crowd everything else out, but uh and I quite admire them for it because they get an awful lot done with that enthusiasm and really a consecration almost to their jobs.

[ER:] Well, I can remember in the old days, which I imagine you're too young to remember, that it was the Children's Bureau and the people then at the head of it, who really started, or through the Children's Bureau, that the first agitation about uh maternal uh care and the death rate in childbirth was--was begun and um has had marvelous results in this country.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, that is true. The first White House conference uh was called by President Theodore Roosevelt, and out of that came the Children's Bureau, that was the big step forward.

[ER:] That was the first step.

[Oscar Ewing:] That was the first step. And then the next uh children's conference ten years later uh they--they got into this uh maternal and childcare. Uh and each year the--that they have taken up a different subject and have made great advances in, and uh we felt, uh for instance, that the economic problem by and large has--that the government has dealt with it, whether it's satisfactorily or not I'm sure there would be differences of opinion. So that this year, we decided to concentrate on the emotional adjustment of children because that is becoming more and more of a difficult topic--

[ER:] That's the newest thing psychiatry working with children.

[Oscar Ewing:] Exactly.

[ER:] But [ER coughs] in the years between the conferences, it's really the Children's Bureau that carries on [Oscar Ewing: Oh, indeed.] the work isn't it [Oscar Ewing: Indeed.] um the recommendations [Oscar Ewing: Indeed.] and so that uh the actual uh things that come out of a conference are produced by the Children's Bureau.

[Oscar Ewing:] Yes, indeed. And during the last war, the Children's Bureau did a very fine piece of work in the emergency maternal and child care. They actually cared for over a million wives of servicemen and uh there was uh I think about a million and a quarter children involved too, and uh it was a great thing that they did there.

[ER:] Well, I-I-I have a very soft spot in my heart for the Children's Bureau, [ER laughs] and there's another thing that of course you mentioned very early in that I have a very great interest in and that's the problem facing parents in the school situation. Is it better um are we getting the new buildings and the teachers that we need? Just what do we face now in the country?

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, the--the picture there is anything but bright. Uh we have uh, if you don't mind my quoting a few figures uh, actually uh we [Oscar Ewing coughs] need about uh two hundred and seventy thousand more classrooms in the next ten years. [ER: Whew] You see uh since 1941, Mrs. Roosevelt, there has been a tremendous increase in the birth rate, and particularly since the war.

[ER:] I can believe that because in my own village of Hyde Park, they thought when they built their new schools that my husband's, oh, urging beyond anything, that they had more space than they would use in fifty years. They are now having the youngest children in the village meet in our Episcopal Church [ER laughs] reading room, and the next school has its youngest children meeting in the fire house! [ER laughs]

[Oscar Ewing:] Is that uh well -- those conditions uh Hyde Park [ER coughs] isn't unique on that. Those conditions exist all over the country [ER coughs]. You know we need in addition to uh, we need one hundred and fifty-thousand uh more classrooms to replace inadequate buildings.

[ER:] Well what about teachers? I think that's one of the most important things.

[Oscar Ewing and ER overlap:] Well, we need a great many more primary teachers uh for the elementary schools we should have a hundred thousand more a year. That's the requirement almost, and we're only producing about a third of that number. Now curiously enough for secondary uh schools, uh the high schools, uh more people go into that type of uh teaching with the result that uh -- [ER: But it's easier. [ER and Oscar Ewing laugh] Well-- [ER and Oscar Ewing laugh] But anyhow, uh there are uh on the whole more teachers there than we need. Then again in college there's a shortage. [ER: Mhm.] But uh the-the school system is-is-is needs help all over the country, particularly operating. As you may know the president has urged uh Congress to uh vote a hundred -- three hundred million dollars a year to the operation of schools, and that bill has not been enacted. And then there uh is also -- he's recommended uh a very generous appropriation for to help the localities on their construction, and uh they all-if-if we can get some action on these it'll-it'll-it'll help relieve the situation but--

[ER:] Well, I wish I thought we could, but we have so little time now and I want to ask you one thing about uh the health legislation, which is perhaps the most controversial thing that your name is associated with -- the national health insurance. Just one word about your feeling on that because we have so little time left.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, I feel very, very strongly that uh the country is coming to it and must come to it. We have the finest medical services in the world, but it is not adequately distributed--

[ER:] We are short of doctors and nurses.

[Oscar Ewing:] We're short of doctors and nurses, but primarily the problem that uh we've been trying to deal with is the economic problem of enabling people to pay. Half of the pop-our population virtually lives in families where total family income is less than three thousand dollars a year and they cannot stand.

[ER:] Well, that's where insurance would help.

[Oscar Ewing:] Oh, indeed, indeed.

[ER:] Well, I'm very grateful to you Mr. Ewing, I wish we had longer but unfortunately our time has run out, and I want to say thank you and I hope we'll another chance.

[Oscar Ewing:] Well, it's very nice to be here indeed.

[Break 36:08-36:17]

[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. (36:33)

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