

THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

July 21, 1949 (catalog date)

Description: In this segment, ER discusses a report composed by the American Friends Service Committee, a group of Quakers who sought to improve relations between the United States.

Participants: ER

[ER:] Thank you, Anna. The American Friends Service Committee has worked for more than a year to prepare a report on Soviet-American relations. Headed by the president of Haverford College, Gilbert White, the group of American Quakers has met to discuss East-West problems with leading men in our own State Department, as well as Soviet officials like Jacob Malik and Andrei Gromyko. The intention of this Quaker group was to try to find a practical basis from which to proceed to improve Soviet-American relations. And the Quakers believe that one basis from which we should proceed is recognition of the fact that both Russian communism and American capitalism are in the world to stay. Furthermore, the report states as its belief that both systems can exist in peace. Now, I would like to say about that, that uh recognition of these things has to be twofold. I think the United States has long recognized that it's quite possible that Russian communism and American capitalism can live together in the world if each of them will stop trying to undermine the other. But uh we've not found much cooperation along those lines as yet. I think perhaps that's the basic trouble with this report --that they assume cooperation on the part of the USSR, just as they assume that we will cooperate, and I think it's more likely that the United States will cooperate uh than it is that the USSR will cooperate. But, the Quakers are a very good group to get both sides together because no other group could possibly talk as honestly with Russian officials, and that's because they have a never-ending faith, the Quakers, in the good in human nature, and they will and have worked in the USSR and that has gained them recognition.

I don't know of course whether this report is right or wrong in all--some--some of its finding and conclusions, but I'd like to talk a little bit about it. The report says that a basic article of the Communist faith as it realizes is the inevitability of a final, violent conflict between the Soviet and the capitalist world. But it adds that the Communists do not desire this clash, rather they see it as something determined by history. But you see, when--what they mean by "determined by history" is that the democracies are not going to be able to really make it worthwhile for people to live in democratic fashion. They believe that they--peoples of the world that have been unhappy like the peoples of Asia and Africa must turn. That's what they mean by determined by history--they must turn to communism because the democracies cannot make life worthwhile for them.

Quakers see a hope that the communist attitude may change, but I don't really think they acknowledge what the real communist attitude is. They do say it would seem unwarranted to assume that Russian Marxism would stand in the way of an acceptance of the idea of peaceful coexistence, if new historical conditions made it appear advantageous. Now I don't really know what that means. It doesn't mean a great deal to me because uh the only thing that will make them really cooperate is to find that the democracies actually can bring about a better life for people and to know that therefore communism is not going to be the only method of achieving these ends in the world. And so while the Quakers seem to put it as a burden upon the United States to create these new historical conditions, I believe that uh they have to be created by the success of democracy. And while I agree that it would be a good investment for the United States to make more than a reasonable effort to improve um in every way possible the um uh ways in which we meet with the USSR, I think the only successful way is to make democracy work. And now back to my daughter Anna, in Hollywood. (5:11)

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