

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

January 10th, 1951

Description: This segment can also be found in 72-30(66) Track 1. In the interview segment, ER discusses the Colombo plan with Lord Gordon Macdonald.

Participants: Eleanor Roosevelt, Lord Gordon Macdonald

[ER:] Now, we must come back to our questions and the first thing I want to ask you is how do you plan to start this work? Where--in a small area, or a big area, how do you plan to get started?

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[ER:] Well, it's working uh it--to a limited extent, until you find the people and also the uh wherewithal, I suppose, to begin on your--first of all, your agricultural plans, which will be a very great increase in-in um dealing with all the land. Are you planning to start some small TVA uh projects?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Well, each of the countries submitted to the conference their own plans, how they thought they could develop the resources of their own countries in the best way. Those plans were examined by the conference, the conference was satisfied, they were sound plans; they were not grandiose, not spectacular, but they were practical and realistic. Those plans were accepted; they took the form in some places of mechanization of agriculture, in others, of schemes not unlike TVA.

[ER:] That would um I've always-I always think of-of uh Asia as being um bedeviled by floods, and um, of course, floods bring in their wake famine because you wash all the good top soil down into the ocean. [Lord Gordon Macdonald: Right.] So I imagine that you want to control those floods, that's one of the things. But as a byproduct, of course, of um the control of the floods is the production of power and the production with us, of course, and our TVA um we set up um a plant--a plant which produces uh chemical-chemicals of different kinds, which uh have proved very valuable. Will that be possible to do there, too?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] To some degree. In the different--in the six difference countries affected by the plan, conditions vary, and level of development varies. In India and Pakistan in particular, attention will have to be given to the water matter--the water question to which you referred.

[ER:] India and Pakistan, [Lord Gordon Macdonald: In particular.] well now, what about Indonesia?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Indonesia, as such, are not within the plan at the moment.

[ER:] Oh, they're not in the plan?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] No, there--countries outside the commonwealth hesitated to come in for various reasons. They did send observers to the London conference; those observers have reported back to

their governments, and it is thought possible that the countries outside the commonwealth in the area will take advantage of the plan in the near future.

[ER:] Well they've--then in that case, they would have to put up more money, wouldn't they, for it? Or someone would have to put it up.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] The pl-the plan works this way: their ec-they're asked themselves, "Submit your plans, submit the cost, and at the same time, submit your own contribution to meeting the cost." Then the margin between what they themselves can do financially is considered by the commonwealth. The common-the commonwealth then determines what she can do as a whole. There'll be still be a margin left, we know. We shall then approach other countries who've shown great sympathy in the Far East since the Second World War.

[ER:] Oh I think uh, I think that's very interesting, how-how you plan to finance that, and I should think many countries outside of the commonwealth in that area would want to join. Now has Australia-has Australia got a plan? That they um put into--

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Yes, each commonwealth country is considering now to what extent it can help, and in what way it can help. Help will be given I think very largely on the technical side by the sending of individuals from the various countries at the expense of the country that sends them. That will be their financial contribution as well as their technical contribution. (53:09)

[ER:] I see, but Australia itself um has a problem in the interior, hasn't it? Are you trying to meet er--to develop that part of Australia?

[ER and Lord Gordon Macdonald overlap]

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Not in this plan.

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[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] No.

[ER:] That's a plan of Australia's uh own?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Well she-she thinks--and I think she's quite right, I was over there quite a while in the-the earlier part of this year--she thinks she can deal with her own problems without help from outside.

[ER:] I remember very well wondering um at the amount of land that had to be devoted to the upkeep of one sheep [ER laughs] and thinking that there must be underground rivers that could be tapped, but I've never heard of-of anything of that sort being done there.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Well I was myself was rather amazed to find out--I was invited to a sheep farm and I hadn't uh--I discovered later was a very good farm--but even on that farm, one sheep to an acre. I heard in else-in other places that it was one sheep to one and a half acres which gives an indication of water trouble.

[ER and Lord Gordon Macdonald overlap]

[ER:] Well I-I remember them telling me it was even more than that in some places, so that it seemed to me it was a rather extravagant way to use your land. Um well now, you're going to need a very varied assortment of technicians. Will you be able to draw purely from the commonwealth, or will you try and get them from other countries as well? (54:35)

(FROM HERE ONWARD, transcribed by Jay Fondin, 9/22/2015)

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Well, the financial problem itself will have to be dealt with both by immediate finance and also by technical aid on the lines we've suggested. I was looking just now at some figures so that the outside world will realize what will be needed to make this plan a success. As I've said already, the task of providing financial support cannot be found within the countries in question. If the program is to be carried out in full, the cooperation of other governments, of organizations such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and of private investors in other countries will be necessary. Of expenditure plan under the program, I notice, thirty-two percent would be devoted to agriculture, including multipurpose projects of flood control--which you've already mentioned--irrigation, and hydroelectric power, thirty-four percent to transportation, and six percent to industry and mining, leaving eighteen percent to urgently needed improvements in educational, health, facilities, and other social projects--projects which I know that you yourself will be deeply interested in.

[ER:] Yes, well I realize that almost uh some of those uh projects will have to come first. For instance, there must be people in these areas who really can't do a day's work, partly because they've never had enough to eat, and partly because uh they're suffering from diseases that must be brought under control. Now, I should almost think that you'd have to have a World Health program before, in some places, you could get started.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Yes, it'll--the first step to be taken in different countries, regard must be had to the local conditions. And it may be that our first job will be to feed them--not only from inside, but to feed them from outside. At the present moment the--the needs of the people are far beyond the res--the developed resource of the people. Not beyond the undeveloped resources; the potential resources of the area are sufficient to meet the requirements of the area, providing, as a result of this plan, those resources can be fully developed.

[ER:] Yes, I see uh [ER laughs] it's going to take some time, and in the meantime you're going to have to try to draw your s--your uh increased needs from other countries. [Lord Gordon Macdonald: I--] Do you know where they're coming from?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] No, there's no--there's nothing definitely decided. What's felt is this, of course: that uh at the moment, the standard of life is very low. And uh our real anxiety is that we can't raise the standard of life [ER: We can't raise it too much.] because of the heavy increase in population.

[ER:] Yes. Uh you--you mean that you'd never be able to catch up with the increase in population?

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Well this--this is a six-year plan. We're afraid by the end of the six years, if we've kept pace with increased population, we shall have done very well. But we do believe, as result of the application of this plan, that after the six years, there is a possibility of passing, as it were, the population problem.

[ER:] Of course, if you raise the standard of living, your birth rate will go down.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] That's right.

[ER:] That always happens. [Lord Gordon Macdonald: That's right.] And even without uh really putting out a birth control uh um educational program, it will go down automatically as you raise the standard, I think.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Yes, consideration was given to the birth control aspect of it, but we soon realized that uh for various reasons, not the least of which being the religious reason, we couldn't pursue it.

[ER:] No, well that's um that's very often found to uh to be the case. I wonder if the present situation in Asia will uh trouble your plan a great deal.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Yes, I'm afraid it may do so insofar, of course, that it places an additional strain on the resources of the countries to whom we look for support. [ER: Well that's--] The present situation will certainly be a heavy drain, and we're just afraid that because of that, the plan is being launched at a rather unhappy moment.

[ER:] Well, that's too bad, but I'm glad it's being launched, and I want to thank you so much for coming this evening--today and telling us about it. And I'm very hopeful that you will have success in spite of difficulties.

[Lord Gordon Macdonald:] Thank you very much.

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Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)
File(s): 72-30(66) Track 2

(Copy/pasted this duplicate section from edits already made on 66 Track 1's transcription – Jay Fondin)
2nd Edit: MJ Binker 10/1/2015

Transcription: Nick Grant
First Edit: Jay Fondin
Final Edit: Mary Jo Binker
Final Check: Natalie Hall