

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

February 21st, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the right of recent immigrants to voice an opinion about United States foreign policy and American foreign aid to China. In the interview segment, ER discusses military and economic aid to Europe with Herbert H. Lehman.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Senator Herbert H. Lehman.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] We have a-an interesting letter today mother, from Mrs. Tony Rosengarden of Point Pleasant, Pennsylvania. She writes, "After I had the great fortune to escape Hitler's Germany with my closest family, I found myself asking 'what for am I saved' and I vowed to become a better informed and more responsible citizen. I studied hard and it took years until I was able to take a definite position on political issues. For example it is only since a few months that I am able to answer the questionnaire sent by the people's section of the UN. I feel very unhappy if I find myself in disagreement with you. I feel very strongly against an alliance with Chiang [Kai-shek]. We have in the white papers and hundreds of other reports the facts that he had failed his people in spite of all these reports we did help him again in 1949. It was wrong and wrong never produces right, as we see clearly now. The first Peiping [Beijing] government was founded by one third communists, one third democrats and one third of little farmers. If I am right this took place in November 1948, so it is about two years that we failed to accept their representatives in the UN. It does not seem fair to say now that the Chinese people cannot shoot their way into the UN, they never felt our goodwill. In 1949 they lost four million people by starvation, but we did not move a finger. As far as I could learn Mao is a much greater human than Tito. Do you think Mrs. Roosevelt that as a newcomer to the country I should refrain from any criticism, however well I mean, because it causes resentment?" (2:13)

[ER:] Why no, I think you should say exactly what you think. I agree with you, for instance, in your position on the Generalissimo Chiang. I think uh--I think there are a number of people, and very fine people in our country, who think that since we are primarily fighting communism we should accept anyone, regardless of what they stand for, that fights communism. Uh I am not at all convinced that that is uh the right thing to do, and personally I would leave the Chinese to settle their own problems with the help of the other Asiatic peoples, and I would not interfere either by helping Chiang or anyone else. Uh I would feel a little differently from the way you feel about uh a government set up with the aid of the communists and controlled by the communists. If you had listened as I did to the Chinese communist representatives, you would know that they never uttered one word which was not in exact accordance with the communist line and it was like listening to uh the delegate from the USSR talking. Now uh I am not in favor of communism, therefore I'm not in favor at the present time of admitting a nation that is not a unified nation, that has it within it still uh many people who do not accept either one side or the other as being representative and I would wait until uh there was a government--the Chinese people, have been recognized and belong but they don't have representatives at present from my point of view that really represent them. Uh I-I don't think that the Generalissimo Chiang can say he speaks for the whole Chinese people, and uh I don't think that the communist government perhaps can, but I think that if the day comes when there is a unified government in China and they come uh with the backing of the other Asiatic peoples and say "we are now prepared to assume the obligations placed upon everybody who accepts the charter," that then perhaps we should consider uh that application. I still reserve judgment a little on it because I still feel that uh the people in control today are rather completely under communist [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] orders and to accept another satellite uh seems a little difficult, but it may be the only

thing we can do and it may be the right thing to do [ER coughs] I'm not sure, [Elliott Roosevelt: Well don't--] but I would like to wait until that question was brought to us um when China was a complete nation.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well don't you think that this uh letter uh has certain inaccuracies? For instances the statement that the Peiping government uh is composed of one third communists, one third democrats and one of third little farmers. Uh I have never seen anything uh anywhere that uh indicated anything but a complete control by the uh Moscow-trained communists uh in China.

[ER:] Well I haven't either, but I think what she has been reading about is what they first said they were going to set up, and that was the ideal set-up that they hoped to have. I don't think it ever materialized.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh huh. Well now uh the question about uh-uh the recognition of Mao by the UN and the support by the United States in the first place, uh one of the things that would disturb me very much and may be of some enlightenment to this lady as to my attitude on it uh-- I feel that uh some of the farces that are carried on by communists in their statement, uh for instance uh they claim that North Korea was attacked by South Koreans uh when all the facts are known that the North Koreans invaded South Korea, then uh this news story that all the Chinese that are in Korea fighting the UN forces [ER: Are volunteers.] are all volunteers is utter and complete nonsense as anybody in their right mind would know, and therefore why can you say that a man like Mao is a great human being? (7:48)

[ER:] Well of course, uh that volunteer fiction has to be kept up because uh otherw- uh the treaty between China and Russia uh would compel Russia to come to China's aid if her real armies uh were attacked, were engaged, so you have to have only volunteers because China can't be actually attacked and uh that's why of course uh that that fiction has been kept up and uh it's very clever of the USSR to uh find so many people who can be expendable. [ER laughs] And it's one of the cleverest things that now the USSR is doing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I think that one of the uh-uh most interesting things would be if uh the UN were to brand uh communist China as an aggressor in the Korean affair [ER: it has]. Uh then uh then I see no other uh viewpoint for the Soviet Union to take other than to uh state that uh that China is at war with the UN police forces.

[ER:] Well uh it has been branded as an aggressor; I think you were away perhaps and didn't see- [ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt] I know I-I know that it was branded as an aggressor but the point of the matter is that nobody has yet brought it out that in actuality therefore China is at war.

[ER:] Well um I don't think that will bother the USSR at all. One of the wonderful things about uh the communist government in the USSR is you don't have to be logical, you don't have to say anything you don't want to say, eh and you don't uh if uh-uh something has become a little disagreeable you can lie with perfect ease. So that's one of the really comfortable things about the uh communist government and the [Elliott Roosevelt: Well that--] communist position.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh the one more uh question that I think might-might be dealt with a little bit more and that is the-the question that the lady raises of being a newcomer to this country and a new citizen uh as to whether it is advisable for her to refrain from uh taking outspoken positions on controversial issues.

[ER:] That I think is purely uh personal question that she'll have to decide for herself. If she feels that it brings her suspicion and that she still has to establish herself more firmly, then she probably is wise not to

take too firm and outspoken positions. I personally think that that's one of the things we should fight for in this country: the right to express our opinions. And whether we are new citizens or old citizens, once we have become citizens that is one of our rights and to abandon it, I think, is one of the very sad things that we uh [Elliott Roosevelt: That could happen.] that a number of people have done. And that I personally, uh fight against with all my might. I might disagree with her violently but I would fight for her right to say what she thought. Now, I would not fight for her right to advise the overthrow of government by force because that is against the law, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] but I would fight for her right to say anything short of advising people to overthrow government by force.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright, I think that pretty well answers the question that she has raised and so we'll now go on to another part of the program. (11:48)

(Break 11:48 - 12:02)

[ER:] Many persons today are concerned about the amount of seeming dissention in the national and international ranks, the inability to arrive at a peaceful solution of present problems, but we must remember that it is action without which we wouldn't be [unclear]. This action is based on fact and to enable us to understand it we must know these facts, so today I'm particularly happy to have as my guest a gentleman who's given a good deal of thought as well as action to these problems. I'm very happy to introduce to you the Democratic Senator from New York Mr. Herbert H. Lehman.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] Thank you very much Mrs. Roosevelt, I'm very happy and proud to be on the program with you.

[ER:] Now uh, Mr. Senator uh I think it's difficult for a great many people to realize, especially when we have men fighting in Korea, that we have obligations in other parts of the world as well and that um our security may not rest on the outcome of the Korean War alone. And I would like to ask you how you think of the things that should be done today.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] Well I think the d-debate which has been carried on in the Senate and elsewhere throughout the country is very useful; I think there should be an exchange of views. Uh the proposal has been made by president, former President Hoover that we virtually withdraw from uh the rest of the world and devote all of our energies and all of our strength to the fortification of the Western hemisphere. Uh to a lesser extent the same proposal has been made by Senator Taft. I think uh that that proposal would be a very, very dangerous one if we carried it out. I do not that we can survive completely isolated from the rest of the world and specifically from Western Europe.

[ER:] Well, I would agree with you wholeheartedly on that and I think uh the proposal in both cases, and uh much the same thing uh has been said by uh-uh Mr. Kennedy. I-I happen uh to think that uh there are many ways in which uh we must meet uh present day uh problems. But they are not uh by withdrawing from what uh was proved in the last uh war I think to be a very important frontier [ER laughs]. So that I hardly see how uh we can even think of uh abandoning uh the rest of the free world [ER laughs] uh across the Atlantic Ocean. Uh I was interested in a remark made by Senator [Estes] Kefauver on one of my television programs that uh there was no thought of abandoning or of being isolationist, it was simply that we desired uh cooperation and that we should expect Europe to provide two hundred and sixty divisions before we sent any men. That seemed to me totally unrealistic because I happen to know what the effect of occupation and uh-uh being conquered has on a nation. And I think probably the role we have to play is a great role of leadership which uh doesn't mean that there may not be in the end, if we need it, and of course I pray for peace and not for war, but if we need it I don't think it means in the end we might not have the two hundred and sixty divisions from our allies, but I think it means that the leadership must come from us. What do you feel?

[Herbert H. Lehman:] I-I-I uh don't think there's any doubt about it. I also wish to say Mrs. Roosevelt that when I advocate strength, military strength, that I'm doing it uh for the sake of maintaining peace. I think our greatest chance of maintaining peace is to be strong and to take our very definite part in the work of the United Nations. Now President Hoover in his uh well-known speech said that he would not send another dollar or another man to Europe until the Western European countries had erected a sure dam against the communist flood. Now of course if we did-- if they were able by themselves and without our leadership and without our help, uh, to erect such a dam, which is doubtful under any circumstances, of course they wouldn't need us.

[ER:] Well it hasn't been uh-- it hasn't been possible uh against the Nazi uh flood, we've always had to come in in the long run. (17:51)

[Herbert H. Lehman:] We-we certainly always did and what's more I found that many of the countries of Europe, Western Europe, notably Great Britain certainly withstood the Nazi flood for a long time until we were able to prepare to help them. [ER and Herbert H. Lehman overlap]

[ER:] Until we were able to prepare and in each case uh we had to prepare because otherwise had they had gone down we would have been the victims.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] Well there's no doubt it and I think the--this country and the world and humanity owes the greatest debt of gratitude to your distinguished husband in-in inspiring us to prepare so that we would be ready to withstand the aggression of the Nazis. [ER and Herbert H. Lehman overlap]

[ER:] But you see sir, what we must now realize I think is that before they have been able to hold it, to be the dam until we could prepare. Now uh we have to provide the leadership.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] We certainly do and th-- may I just say uh a few words? What would happen if we abandoned Europe as is proposed? I mean after all, uh-uh-uh Senator Taft hasn't gone quite as far as President Hoover but they have reached the same uh conclusion the same end uh don't send any ground troops or uh in the case of uh President Hoover, don't send any aid at all. Now if we did that we would be surrendering Western Europe uh to the communist forces. Uh we would be losing the great advantage that we have today and that is the superiority in industrial production. I just want to give you one example, that of steel. Today the United States produces about a hundred million tons of steel, Russia and its satellites-satellites produce about thirty-five million tons. Continental Europe uh plus Great Britain produce a hundred and sixty uh sixty million tons. Therefore the United States and Continental Western Europe have a potential capacity of steel of a hundred sixty million uh tons of steel, while Russia and its satellites have a production of thirty-five million tons. In other words we have a nearly five to one superiority, but if we surrendered Europe uh to uh to Russia the situation would completely change and then Russia and its satellites would have ninety-five million tons of steel and we would have a hundred million tons. In other words we would be surrendering a five to one superiority to a virtual equality with Russia. The same thing holds true in shipping, and in the manufacture of airplanes, in the development of ore and mineral reserves, such as iron ore, coal, potash, lead, zinc, uranium and other uh minerals and metals that are absolutely essential to the uh-to the uh defense of any country [ER: I--] I think it would be the greatest mistake in the world. (21:03)

[ER:] Well I agree with you and I think that in that surrender we would also surrender uh parts of Africa which provide us with some of our most important raw materials.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] There's no doubt at all about that, we would be. We would have difficulty of course in getting the supplies from the Mediterranean countries and from the South--uh and from the African countries.

[ER:] I-I know someone was telling me the other day that much of our uranium uh source lies there.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] A great deal of it lies in the Belgian Congo and we would lose that supply.

[ER:] Uh it-it just seems to me that we ought to remember all that and not uh-uh and-and think rather carefully because uh this is not only a struggle of military force. I-I agree with you entirely that we must have force and we must use it for peace that's asking a lot of a nation. What do you think about our ability to use it just for peace?

[Herbert H. Lehman:] Uh I think we I-I think we first have to make it very clear that we are not going to yield to aggression and that we are going to maintain our principle of maintaining- maintaining freedom and security in the freedom-loving countries of the world. I think that is important. I-I think there's been an awful lot of talk Mrs. Roosevelt about the failure of the Western European countries uh to do their share in preparation. Now you pointed out minute or two ago the great difficulties under which these countries have been-been operating because of the hardships and the losses and the devastation uh which they suffered during the Second World War.

[ER:] The only thing that's helped them is Marshall Plan.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] And that has been a tremendous help to them-- [ER: Tremendous help.] tremendous help. It's really made them made them uh able, uh in my opinion, to do their share in this, in the preparation of defense against the communist aggression, and I think they're carrying it out. I-I-I wonder whether people generally realize when they say that England and France and the other countries are not doing their share that there are more, proportionately more, people under arms in France and in United Kingdom than there are in this country, and that isn't even counting in the reserves the millions and millions of reserves which these countries have.

[ER:] That is just something I want people to remember, and we have to make a break and I think it's a good moment to make it because I want people to think about that and then we'll come right back.

(Break 23:51 -24:05)

[ER:] Uh we are coming back, uh, to our uh interview and I want to ask you something. I saw the other day something which uh impressed me very much uh because it means that the British people are being asked to accept something perhaps greater than we often think of. Uh after the war their country was so badly hit from an economic standpoint that they accepted the continuation of an austerity uh which was pretty tough to take, uh, and we know how little we like austerity because we got rid of our controls just as fast as we could get rid of them, even a little sooner than our economy was prepared for. And now I saw that they'd cut their meat rations in Great Britain 20 percent which is 60 percent uh in the last six months I think, if I'm not mistaken. And when I was in Great Britain six months ago the meat ration per person per week was the size of one chop. Now what's the sixty percent cut mean? And I-I just uh I just think of this as not only a military effort but an economic effort because there's no question in my mind that the raising of the economic standards of underdeveloped countries is part of our struggle against communism just as much as our military strength is, and we're going to be asked to make some sacrifices, but this sacrifice uh in Great Britain uh is something I think we ought to think about because we're asking a good deal of our allies. What do you think? (26:09)

[Herbert H. Lehman:] Well I-I fully agree with you uh, like you Mrs. Roosevelt I spent a great deal of time in Great Britain during the Second World War and I was able to observe personally the austerity under which the-the English people were living. And now uh they have cut their meat supply, that's only one p-p-part of the food uh-uh-uh food uh program by more than 50 percent. Uh it will impose a degree of austerity uh on the people of the United Kingdom which we are completely uh unfamiliar with in this country. And let me say one other thing about that. I understand that uh the government of the United Kingdom has now proposed a defense budget of fourteen billion dollars. Now taking into account the difference in cost, manufacture of armaments because of the difference in wages, difference in the cost of uh-uh of uh providing for the salary, the wages and salaries of the armed forces, the fourteen million dollars is approximately as great as our sixty or seventy billion dollars, which we've appropriated here of course uh giving effect to the difference in population, their population is not much over uh 30 percent as large as ours. [ER: Well--] So that I think they have done, I think they are showing every effort to cooperate with us, and I think we must insist not only in the case of Great Britain but of all the other Western European that every country do its fair share.

[ER:] Oh I think we must too, I don't think that there is any question but what this must be a cooperative effort, but sometimes I wonder whether perhaps as individuals we couldn't show a little appreciation. Uh my own reaction to that cut in the meat uh in Great Britain, remembering what it was when I was there and the effort to eke out when you could only have uh two eggs a week [ER laughs] and when you could only have uh a very small amount of so many other things, uh my reaction was that I wanted immediately to set aside a part of the food that I had every week and take some of my friends in Great Britain and send regularly, it just seemed to me something so selfish not to try and help. That was my reaction to it, now I want them to help very much [ER laughs] but I also think that we need to show appreciation. But I want to get back to uh the-the general uh situation, which we are meeting today and our own uh program, our own way of-of meeting it. Uh you feel as I do that what we do in the economic field for underdeveloped countries is important, don't you sir?

[Herbert H. Lehman:] Oh very important, I think it's uh, it's uh a-a demonstration of our good will and of our desire to raise the standard of living throughout the-the world. I don't think there's anything more important than that, I think if we help people to avoid starvation, if we help them to uh improve uh their agriculture, if we help them to improve their rather meager industrial uh potentialities, I-I think it's going to have a great effect on the world. That's why I've been so strongly in favor of going forward. (30:05)

[ER:] Well, I have too, of course, and one-one reason is that I have a feeling this aid is tied up a little with our moral and spiritual leadership because uh there are areas of the world uh which are suspicious of us uh they feel uh our economic uh interests have not always helped them and uh-uh while I think uh they are unjust sometimes in their estimates of our intentions, nevertheless um I do feel that we have uh we have something to do on our side in that area and in the area of moral and spiritual leadership.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] I quite agree with you, I think if we have failed in any degree that it's been our failure to make unders-- make people understand that we have no selfish designs, that we're-we're not an imperialist nation, that we're trying to help the world and we feel in doing that we're going to help ourselves to greater security. And when I say that we fail to do that, I'm not referring particularly to bringing the message home to the people behind the iron curtains, I know how difficult that is, but I don't think we've convinced the people of the free countries like England and France and the Philippines uh and India [ER: I know we haven't.] that we're really uh-uh that we really have no [ER: I know we haven't.] imperialist designs or selfish designs.

[ER:] No, I know we haven't, and also I don't think that uh they feel we've made enough effort to understand uh some of their feelings. I have that feeling that we have got to make a greater effort at patience and understanding. And that's hard for us because most of us have a feeling that our motives

should be understood, that uh people should feel grateful uh because we have made an effort to help uh and yet uh--and they are resentful when they realize that we are not accepted at our own value. And uh yet uh we have a long way to go before we uh actually gain the confidence, and part of it is-is uh--lies in some of our own home practices.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] I think that's quite right, I've travelled abroad and I have a very wide correspondence with people abroad and I've been appalled at the feeling that has been relayed to me that many of our friends abroad have the feeling that this is a fight between Russia and the United States, they quite-quite uh misunderstand the fact that we are fighting the battle of freedom throughout the world and that we have no imperialist designs, that we are a nation of idealists and that everything we have done in this uh critical period and before has been to increase the standards of living throughout the world, to bring security and lasting peace to the world and that we have no selfish uh motives at all.

[ER:] Well that, that is one of the things which has disturbed me because uh I-I think we fail quite to understand that to many people this is a struggle between two imperialistic nations, and uh they weigh which one will be the least harmful to them and that disturbs me very much [ER laughs].

[Herbert H. Lehman:] That disturbs me very much and I think we've got do something to correct that. I think it's almost, a-as it is about as important as anything we can do. We've got to bring emphasis uh on the spiritual uh phases of this struggle, [ER: and that--] just as much as on the military basis.

[ER:] Seems to me that we've got to bring emphasis--uh that democracy is something you live in your daily life at home, and that everything that happens here is known throughout the world and that we have to live up to our ideals at home.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] There's no doubt at all about that. It's difficult we are not going to reach the millennium overnight but there certainly is a great deal we can do to make it clear that we are practicing what we are preaching.

[ER:] Well I'm glad to hear you say that, Mr. Senator, I'm sure you would feel it. And now I'm sorry to say this interview has to come to an end, but I'm very grateful to you for having taken the time to come and talk on my program today, and I hope that what we have talked about will help to clarify the thinking of many of our friends in the United States.

[Herbert H. Lehman:] I'm very grateful to you Mrs. Roosevelt for the opportunity of discussing this very important subject with you.

(35:42)

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