

## THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

October 23, 1950

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt answer a listener's question about war profiteering and the steps that Congress could make to reduce profits. In the interview segment, ER interviews journalist May Craig about her career, especially Craig's work during World War II.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, May Craig

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[Elliott Roosevelt:] The other day I ran into Mr. Louis Brown, who comes from the Bronx, and he wanted me to ask you a question. Here it is: The present rise in prices in all commodities has forced higher living costs on the American people. Do you think it fair to the soldiers who are fighting in Korea, and their families, that business should be allowed to make increased profits out of war while they are risking their lives? If you agree that this is a bad situation, are the steps which have been taken by our government sufficient to rectify the situation?

[ER:] Well, to answer your first question, of course it isn't fair that business should be able to make great profits when living costs are constantly going up and um the families of the soldiers suffer with all the rest of the people at home as costs soar. I don't think the Congress uh did the right thing when they did not enact an excess profits tax before they went home. They were asked to do so and I think they should have done so before the close of Congress. Uh, I also think that um it is time I'm--to set a ceiling on prices. You cannot set a ceiling on wages until you set a ceiling on prices. Uh, the two always um rise-uh, must rise together. Um so if you really want to keep the cost of living down for everybody, you have to set a ceiling on prices first of all. And, I think, that that is something which should be done and done immediately. A--both these things um are necessary to prevent inflation and I think that the government, uh, should act more quickly than it has acted in both um of the areas, both the area of business and the area of price control. (2:33)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now, Mother, let's take up the area of price control uh first of all. Uh, it seems to me, if my recollection is correct, that uh Congress did pass a bill which gave the powers to the President to be able--so that he would be able to roll back prices to whatever level he thought it best for those prices to be rolled back to.

[ER:] Congress did pass such a bill, and I said, in my first answer, that the administration and Congress jointly must do the various things. Now this is an area in which the administration has to act. Now when you say 'the administration' you mean not one person, but a good many people. You mean the heads of the Commerce Department, of Agriculture and of Labor and uh the people who are going-- studying the resources of the country. You have to take the advice of a great many people. That's why government moves so slowly. It has to bring together the best thought of a great many people. But it seems to me that in this particular case we've had a good deal of expert advice on this subject, and I think that by now the heads of government should be ready to take what action they feel can be taken to hold down inflation and keep the cost of living from uh rising so that what a man earns has no value because it's eaten up by what he spends. (4:29)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, now, in connection with that uh I have read that the President has taken certain steps to roll back to uh a June level uh the price of certain commodities but, I have not seen it reflected in

a roll back in prices in the retail stores. Is that because he has not struck at the retail price level, or because he has uh just struck at commodities which are not reflected in our own buying as families?

[ER:] Well that's very difficult to say and I don't think I could answer that. That's a question an-- that an economist, I imagine uh would have watched very carefully and I haven't.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] Um but I am sure that the place where you need to reflect it, largely, is in um food stuffs. And um very often you do not at once see the uh cut in the wholesale price reflected in the retail uh buying. It- it does get there eventually but it often takes a little while to show up. (5:47)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I have been asked by a good many of my friends, and- and I must confess that I don't know the answer to it; maybe you can give me the answer. We have uh through the Department of Agriculture, a system of supporting the price of farm products uh in this country, and that has gone on, and we are buying up surplus products such as, for instance, potatoes. If you buy potatoes, or you buy eggs in the market right now, you pay a very hefty price for those articles of food. And still, at the same time, the government is stockpiling uh several years' supply. Why is it that uh we should not uh allow at least a slackening of that program so that the price can come down to more nearly fit the pocketbook of the average American home?

[ER:] You have to go quite a ways back to understand the uh price support for agricultural products um [ER coughs] the effort uh is made in this country [ER clears throat] to support uh prices for agricultural products um as a compensation, really, for what was done through tariffs for uh the um manufactured goods. Um this was a device, in other words, to keep the farmer's income on a level uh so that he could buy, in this country--because in the last depression it began by the fact that the farmer's income sank um so badly that he was losing his farms, he couldn't, if he had a mortgaged farm he couldn't pay the mortgage on his farm. And, in the end--it took a little while to do it, but in the end he couldn't buy the manufactured products and, as a result, then, we had the depression because factories began to close. Nobody was buying their goods. And the re--the condition in the country was reflected, finally, in the cities, and we had uh depression. And this, as we had always had tariffs to protect our manufactured goods, this device for keeping the farmer at a level where he could have a stable income, was a device, if you choose to think of it in that way, and uh it is true that basically the consumer um is the person who pays. But farmers and wage-earners are all consumers together. (8:46)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] So you can't think of it as um uh people who are separated. When you talk about the consumer you also talk about the producer. Because his uh-his wages, for instance, are in the cost of the very thing that he buys.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] So this was a method of saving us from uh depression. Now, I don't know how it could be adjusted, it probably could be adjusted in- in many ways. And there are things that um make one wish that one's surpluses could be moved more quickly. But those are all things I think we should bring an expert to really discuss onto this program.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes. Well, I'd like to take a little longer on this topic but maybe uh you can get somebody to come and visit us and explain about such things as this, and- and for instance the Brannen

plan, which seems to be a departure and which there seems to be a tremendous amount of controversy about.

[ER:] Well I'd like Mr. Brannen and I'd like someone who's opposed to him to come on and tell us about it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well that would be wonderful. Well, now I think that uh we should get on to another part of the program, don't you?

[ER:] Yes, I imagine it's time to go along. [ER chuckles] (10:11)

(Break 10:12-10:21)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mrs. Roosevelt has as a guest today, uh, one who is very familiar to many radio and television fans. This lady has sparkled with her witty and sometimes acid questioning of political guests on Meet the Press. She is the Washington correspondent for the Guy-Gannett newspapers and radio stations in the state of Maine. Miss May Craig was a star war correspondent of World War II, and since the war, has travelled all over the world on behalf of her papers and radio stations. Mother, will you take over with your old friend?

[ER:] With great pleasure. May, I think everyone would be interested to know why a Washington correspondent comes to New York in quest of news.

[May Craig:] Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, you cannot be a good Washington correspondent unless you know what happens at the other end. We pass laws in Washington that affect not only the nation but the whole world. And then the Washington correspondent to know, really to know, what's good goes off and sees what happens on the other end. That's why I'm up here now. (11:35)

[ER:] Well now that's very interesting to me. What exactly are we--uh has been going on in Washington lately?

[May Craig:] Well the particular thing that brought me up here was the United Nations. I wanted to see what they were going to do about Korea. Down in Washington they appropriated a lot of money for the war. They appropriated a lot of money for our own general defense around the world. Communism, both in this country and in the other countries, is related to what happens in Korea. And in order to understand thoroughly what they do there, I have to come up here and go out to Lake Success, and that's what I've been doing the last few days.

[ER:] Well, I know you've been doing that and I've been much interested in seeing how much you got out of Lake Success. Many people go and don't get a great deal, and I feel that there is, uh, a tie between the work you do in Washington and what goes on here in the United Nations. And so, I'd like to ask you whether, having been here these few days, you think of what's going to come, what- what are they getting ready for now in Washington that you feel is tied with the general situation here as you've seen it?

[May Craig:] Well, I think particularly you have to go places in order to get the living feeling of it. You just cannot do it by imaginary, think—just thinking about it or reading reports. And to go out to Lake Success and see all the different people, the different colors—the yellows, the blacks, the browns—the different languages, the different way they look at things. Of course, you can't be an expert in a few days out there, but you can get the feeling of all the people coming together and at least talking about it. Now, in Washington, there's a lot of condemnation of the amount of talk that goes on at Lake Success. But I looked at that conference room today, the political committee, where they were talking about Korea, and

it seemed to me that that was just as much a battleground as Korea. They were fighting with words and ideas but still it was a battleground, and we don't begrudge spending weeks and weeks on physical battles with guns, and I don't think perhaps we ought to begrudge doing it with words, it's- it's a better way. (13:55)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] May, I'd like to just break in for a second to ask a question. Uh do you find that there's resentment on the part of the correspondents who are assigned to cover the UN when a Washington correspondent comes busting up here and goes out there too? [Elliott Roosevelt laughs]

[May Craig:] Oh, they don't resent us; they just look down on us and despise us and think we don't know anything. And we think all they know is the United Nations. I feel quite superior because in Washington I go to the White House Press conferences and I know Congress and I know the other departments. So, it makes it alright, we both feel superior.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh in others words when they come down to Washington they come to see you in order to get into the White House [laughs][May Craig and Elliott Roosevelt overlap here] press galleries.

[May Craig:][Elliott Roosevelt] That's right, that's right, that's right.

[ER:] Well now I want to ask you something because, um, you did go to battlefronts during the war and you weren't perhaps obliged to go, and I'd like to know, um, if you would tell us, what made you feel you had to go? The same feeling of wanting to see?

[May Craig:] Yes, it was the same thing. We passed all these resolutions which drafted the bodies of young men and sent them over there. We had the high ideals that we spoke to them about why we were doing it. There was a fearful amount of American money spent. There was the relationship of America to the other countries, the other allies, and to the enemy. And you had to go over there. I will never forget the campaign in Normandy, coming up Normandy and into Paris. The mud. I was a mile and a quarter from the mess tent and the mud there in Normandy and believe me I knew a little bit about what the GIs had to do then. Then I went into Paris for the liberation, and no matter what else ever happens to me in all my life, I'll never forget the lift you got out of that liberation. (15:48)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well I'd like to also state, May, that uh you gave a lot of people who were over there for a long time a great lift too because of your willingness to wade through that mud and take part of the same type of life that we'd been going through for a long time.

[ER:] Well I can appreciate the mud. Though the mud that I saw most of course was in the Pacific, but I can remember well one of the hospitals in the Pacific and seeing the nurses, who at that time didn't yet have proper shoes and uniforms, working over their patients with GI shoes on and GI trousers and hardly any water to use, and I-I-I don't think I'll ever forget that either because it gave you such a close touch with what the men had to go through.

[May Craig:] You know one of the worst things for me, I was an utter civilian, nobody ever told me what fear was, for instance. And, of course, I went over there and landed right into the bombing, and I was so scared and I tried to pretend I wasn't, and then I found out that everybody else was. And although I wouldn't want a bomb to fall over here, I've often thought it would be a good thing if our people knew what bombing was like and they'd have a little bit more sympathy with people overseas. (17:13)

[ER:] May, I think it's good for all of us to know that all of us are afraid. That the real courage is not uh shown by not being afraid. It's shown by what you do in spite of being afraid, because it's the people with imagination who are afraid and um it's- it's really a, quite uh natural that everyone should be afraid, it's

what you still can do in spite of it. Just as you said, you uh you tried to show that you-you weren't afraid. That, of course, if what we all try to do. And I'd like to ask you one more thing. Uh you've not only been to battlefronts during the war, but you've been around the world since the war. Now, what made you do that?

[May Craig:] Well, every year I try to go someplace. I went down to the Inter-American Defense Conference in Brazil when we put our--made our treaty there. Last year I just took a quick, three month trip around the world by air because I wanted to find out what they were all thinking at more or less the same time, contemporaneously. If you stay very long in one country, you lose touch with the rest, so I went around very quickly and went to a lot of different countries, and it was very valuable to find out what they thought of us. Then when I came back and sat in the halls of Congress, all during this last session, I could relate the debates on the floor to what I had found out about people actually over there-- what they thought of us and what they wanted from us. (18:54)

[ER:] Uh, do you, as a correspondent, ever have a chance to tell the people who are making our laws, whom you come in contact with, some of the things you've learned?

[May Craig:] Well, I'm not exactly backward. As you know. [ER, Elliott Roosevelt and May Craig laugh] And it's--

[ER:][speaking over laughter] But personally I think that's, uh, very valuable.

[May Craig:] Yes, it's-it is true. In the press galleries of Congress we sit around in the lobbies, in the speaker's lobby, which is more or less like a club room. And they do; particularly if you've been off someplace. They say "well now, what'd you think, what do you think?" And then, we tell them.

[ER:] Well now what do you think is going to happen when Congress reconvenes?

[May Craig:] Well, there's a lot of things that were left over; they've certainly got to put on the excess profits tax. It's a shame to tax the poor people and not rich people. [overlapping with ER] And they've got to do the selective service.

[ER:] I-I quite agree [end of overlap] but don't you think that they ought also, besides the selective service, to put on um uh top prices--I mean control of prices.

[May Craig:] Well they've already done that. It's up to the President now, and I would suppose he'd have to do it. I would think he would have to do it.

[ER:] Well, I would hope so--

[May Craig:] People just can't afford to pay without wage raises and if you do that, then you've got dreadful inflation. Which is almost-almost now.

[ER:] Well, I-- I am so afraid of inflation that I-I know how we hate controls, but I can't help thinking that it's something that has to go with priorities. You cannot have priorities and not have controls. Now thank you ever so much for being with me. I'm awfully glad you've been up, and I've enjoyed the time you've spent in New York, though I haven't seen enough of you.

[May Craig:] Thank you.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you very much, May Craig, for being with us on the program today. It's really uh wonderful for us to have the opportunity of having you with us.

(20:52)

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