

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

January 11th, 1951

Description: Recording only goes through 23:23. In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's request to discuss the value of the United Nations. In the interview segment, ER and NBC announcer Ben Grauer discuss his broadcasting career.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Ben Grauer

[ER:] Yes, Elliott, what have you got today?

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, a listener's sent in a clipping of a column written by Thomas L. Stokes in the *World Telegram Sun* in which he says, "A good way to assess the value of the United Nations is to imagine what might have happened without it. If nations had been dealing with one another for-for-for formal communications uh instead of having a common room where their rep-representatives could discuss their differences face to face." This listener asked you to comment on this thought. (0:44)

[ER:] Well, I think it was very wise of Thomas Stokes to think of- of saying something like that because there is a great deal of criticism uh now of the United Nations being a center for discussion and not for action and uh-- has it any real value? And has it any vitality? And so forth. And what he said is very true. If we had been dealing with the questions that are now before us and the men had not been gathered together in one place-- they'd been wide apart, it had come through um uh formal communications from this foreign office and that foreign office. Uh I think long before this we would have had declared wars in different parts of the world.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm, well I-I think uh that's very true except that supposing we hadn't had the UN as such but had had the, say, different groups like the Atlantic Pact Nations and we'd had maybe uh European uh Group of Nations--

[ER:] It wouldn't have brought together in one place all of the nations, and it's valuable to have all the nations. I don't know [ER coughs]-I don't know uh that um that they always um act sensibly any more than they act sensibly anywhere. But when people say, "Let's get rid of-of uh the USSR; let's just dissolve the United Nations and just have the nations that feel the same way and, all the democracies, let's have them all join together." [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] That, from my point of view, of course, does no good because it just means you divide the world up and there is no place where you can do um education by contact, and the best education I know is the education that comes by contact. (3:01)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but um let me ask you this: supposing you took the nations who have similar interests and similar problems and you band those nations together. Uh, we'll take for instance uh although they fight- fight a lot amongst--[ER: Atlantic Pact.] No, let's take the South American nations who have uh very diverse uh problems themselves, often fight amongst themselves, but on world questions they usually hang together.

[ER:] They come together in a caucus. They don't always hang together, but they do have a caucus.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Right, they have a caucus. Uh do you not feel that maybe uh an organization built of uh groups of nations who have banded together, appointed leaders, might come to better con--to better decisions when those representatives represented a number of nations in having a representative of each

nation, all of them sitting in there, all of them trying to have an important voice, and none of them agreeing at all? (4:13)

[ER:] Well, that's not true because they meet as um groups and they-they get together on questions all the time. South Americans have a regular caucus on any important uh question that comes up. [Elliott Roosevelt: That is true.] So do other groups and the Commonwealth-- uh the United Kingdom-- the Commonwealth will have a caucus. They often disagree, but on the other hand, they uh they fundamentally agree on a great many things, and [ER coughs] you'll find that happening, groups getting together all the time.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but would it be better--

[ER:] The final thing is essential, that they all get together.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, but would it not be better if uh we called upon various sections and various groups of nations to get together first on a question and make a dec-decision on an issue and then come with a-with a concrete representation of the so-called "majority opinion" of that group.(5:17)

[ER:] They do that.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] They do? [ER: Yes.] Uh, do you really feel that it works that way when you finally get in uh to action?

[ER:] On any very important subject, yes.

[Elliott Roosevelt:]Uh don't you feel that the- that the Soviet bloc is far more uh united and uh that there are no--

[ER:] The Soviet bloc is more obedient.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's what I mean. Wouldn't it be better than if we selected--

[ER:] No! No, it would be much worse.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] It would?

[ER:] Yes, because at least this way uh you don't have a group of automatons. They have got together, they have discussed and those that can agree do agree. And they stick together. But you always have one or two individualists, and they may go out and-and register why they disapprove or why they don't like it, but that doesn't do any harm. The majority has made up its mind. And um in the Soviet Bloc you just have so many echoes.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright well now, you and I have discussed at various times, not on this program, but uh we've discussed the advisability of zones of influence. And um if you remember, I've advanced the theory that maybe a means of uh coming to more common understanding would be to establish zones within the world where there would be zones of influence, and that these zones of influence would compete with each other to see which of the great powers-- the Soviet system or the uh democratic system-- would be able to accomplish the most in their zone. (7:06)

[ER:] Well, I've thought about that a good deal since you talked about it, and thought about it particularly in the present situation which looks as though it might um automatically come to something of that kind.

I'm not sure that I think it a good idea because um the competition would bring friction without any question. The friction exists now, but it's not quite so well lined up and defined, and I'm not sure that having zones of influence um ceded to one side or another and then the competition going on would bring us any more peaceful existence than we have now.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh my feeling is that the cause of war fundamentally is that people are-are jealous of each other and what each other have. Uh and it seems to me that-that if you were in competition that created a-an elimination of uh want and uh of low standards of living, of lack of education, and all of the things that today are the fundamental causes of war, that uh perhaps that competition might be healthy.

[ER:] What you're thinking is that if you could give to everybody certain minimums of living--way of standards, that you would eliminate some of the greed and unhappiness and so forth that exists. But I'm not at all sure that when you have reached that minimum standard, everybody doesn't begin to want that next step up, and it becomes just as important. And um--so that I don't know that you really eliminate any of the trouble [ER laughs] that I--for that reason I'm not at all sure uh that-that-that idea would work. I'm um I'm-I'm intrigued with it, and I think about it, and I'm perfectly willing to consider it, but I just am not a bit convinced that it would work. (9:33)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] In other words, you really feel that whereas the Soviet Union has uh brought about certain minimum standards and they have brought certain educational and sanitation and medical standards into the Soviet Union, that in spite of the fact that those minimums have been established under the Soviet system, that still uh there is something that exists there that has nothing to do with the question of uh achieving a better way of life and being jealous of the other fellow, it's the desire to really achieve a uh domination over somebody else.

[ER:] No, I don't think it's that so much, but when you get to one point then you want another one. Uh, really human beings are always moving on and um they-they always strive, and I think that um in the Soviet Union there must be that same sense of unrest there is in the rest of the world or they wouldn't have to have such big armies.

(Break 10:36-10:54)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now, Mother, now that uh Ben has finished with uh his part of the program we can get back to our interrogation of him and some of his uh historical moments and some of his more personal moments of contact with you.

[ER:] Well, I'd like to ask him right away if he remembers uh how--in how many different uh surroundings we have met?

[Ben Grauer:] Yes, I always have the pleasure of being introduced by some distinguished citizen who uh says, "Ben, I'm going to give you the privilege of meeting Mrs. Roosevelt and takes me forward to meet you, and it's always a pleasure. [Ben Grauer laughs] It's happened in New York--

[ER:] But it always amused me--amuses me because it's always as though you've never met me before.

[ER laughs]

[Ben Grauer:] We've met in some very nice places, Mrs. Roosevelt: [ER: Very nice.] New York, Lake Success, Paris, I believe.

[ER:] Yes, I remember when John Golden brought you in and said, "I want you to know a friend of mine."

[ER laughs] (11:46)

[Ben Grauer:] I remember working with John Golden oh a long time ago--thirty years ago--when I was a kid actor.

[ER:] Oh, were you an actor?

[Ben Grauer:] Well, for a little bit. For a while.

[ER:] Oh, I think that's interesting. We're slowly pulling out all sorts of things out of this man. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs: Oh, we certainly are.] I didn't know he'd been an actor, and a kid actor at that! (12:05)

[Ben Grauer:] For a while.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, in addition to that, you know he's now a producer of plays.

[Ben Grauer:] Now, Elliott, you're very kind but RIP, rest in peace. [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] My little production firm opened with uh-uh banners flying--small banners because we were off Broadway [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] And we did one production *Mrs. Warren's Profession* with Estelle Winwood and John Loder, my partner and I, Norman Rose, and myself. The cost was so high. The public was kind but just not kind enough. So we closed our venture.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Oh, you're not producing anymore?

[Ben Grauer:] No, we're-we're going through a--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] We'll have to find something else for you to produce, it'll be a sure fire hit.

[Ben Grauer:] Solid. I'd be willing. [All laugh]

[ER:] Well, I think the costs are what bother a great many people. I've heard John Golden say that same thing: that the costs are so terrific today that it's almost impossible to make uh any play pay.

[Ben Grauer:] I think Murdock Pemberton, Brock's [Brock Pemberton] brother, wrote an article about a month ago, and it's true that uh it's feast or famine in the theater now. Either you have distinguished

[Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] Cole Porter and uh Ethel Merman [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] and you go for a smash or else you're afraid and you just don't go ahead. (13:12)

[ER:] Well, I grieve a little bit about it because I really love the theater, and I've always wished that uh people all over the country could really know, not just movies, but the theater. There's something different about the personality on the stage. And um yet the cost of theater seats, and the cost of theater seats is-is largely dependent on the cost of production. [Ben Grauer: Right.] And makes it practically impossible for the average person to go to the theater.

[Ben Grauer:] There's one um-uh influence they say that is working against that a little bit is that television, curiously enough, the uh critics, or observers of the theatrical scene, they say that television will heighten a general public interest in the live--the flesh theater.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think so--very definitely.

[ER:] That's what Mr. Golden feels. He told me that a long while ago, he said he felt that whereas radio might have uh hurt it, that television was going to uh help the theater. I hope that's right. [ER laughs]

[Ben Grauer:] I'm willing--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Do you think that uh, Mother, that I could just take a few minutes to uh ask Ben whether uh we could delve into some of the personalities who he's worked with in radio.

[ER:] Yes, of course you can. I'd be interested.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh, there are several uh people that I know that he's worked with that I think we ought to get little anecdotes about. Uh for instance, he uh was the announcer for Walter Winchell for the longest period of time that any announcer has been with a single program, I think from 1932 to '48, was it?

[Ben Grauer:] Forty seven or forty-eight. Sixteen years.

(14:53)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Sixteen years he was with the same program, and uh I'd like for you to tell us a bit about Winchell because Winchell is a sort of a fabulous character to the American public and--

[Ben Grauer:] He is. He's utterly unique. Uh, I-I've met a lot of people, as you must, in those years of broadcasting but no person that combines the lightening mind and the absolutely uh bottomless energy of the man.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[Ben Grauer:] Walter could-- just goes on. I don't know how he does it, no one does. He's- he's uh-- his friends have long given up trying to figure how he does it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think one of the most interesting things about Winchell has been uh the fact that he has carried on an unceasing campaign against all of the "isms" which are counter to our American democracy. [Ben Grauer: Yes.] And he has managed to do it and--uh in spite of many attacks, nobody has really been able to dent the prestige that he has in the American mind because of that fight.

[Ben Grauer:] I remember in the earliest days of Hitler's ascendancy in Europe, he was the very first, in my recollection, to speak out with complete uh [Elliott Roosevelt: Vehemence.] vehemence and power, and attacked uh-uh fascists here. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And then the war years as you know, his tremendous devotion to the American cause, and-and giving unstintingly of his editorial energies. And then as he sensed -- in fact, ahead of many of us I sense here -- he sensed the threat, the danger that communism was to freedoms in the world. He was one of the very first [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] in the happy years of the war, when Russia was our ally--uh Russia was our ally, but then come '45 and the first international conferences and foreshadowed at Potsdam, and the uh foreign ministers meeting in London in '46, he said, "Uh-oh, they're not moving the right way," and he spoke out immediately. I remember coming back from Paris in '46, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] after covering the peace conference and telling him, in a fumbling way in my mind, I said, "The uh Russian tactics that I've seen in the occupied zones," I was in Berlin, and I was in Vienna, "serve only to confuse occupation officials. There is no progress,

there is no attempt at meeting of minds," and he seized on that, I remember, he said, "Ben, that's part of a pattern. They don't really want to get along. They are planning their own imperialism."

[Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And he was telling me, he saw in '46 [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] the essential imperialistic uh terror of the--of Russian diplomacy, which many didn't. (17:25)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Then, Mother, he has had broadcasts with uh one of our guests on this program, um uh Ambassador Warren Austin.

[ER:] Yes, you must have had many.

[Ben Grauer:] Of course, uh Ambassador Austin is uh-- you're his colleague at the United Nations.

[ER:] Yes, indeed.

[Ben Grauer:] I remember one incident, if I may, can I tell this little anecdote? [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] Because it's so revealing, I think. During the uh debates between [Charles Habib] Malik and Austin, which captured the attention of the world in August of forty uh '50--just passed. I was covering it for combined networks on television and we sat in our booth, the NBC people, and we were amazed at-at how uh Ambassador Austin was able to contain himself, and keep his unruffled serenity against the incredible twistings of the truth of Malik. So in the delegate's lounge afterwards, we were chatting, and I approached the ambassador and uh asked some point about the session just concluded, and then I said, "May I ask you, Mr. Ambassador, how do you--how were you able to just keep your temper?" Simple as that. He looked at me for a moment, he said, "Young man," he said to me. He said, "I first came across this kind of perversion in a court in Vermont fifty-one years ago." And the inference was that he had learned through long training as a legal mind, as a jurist, and so on that it's the first thing, is that right, Mrs. Roosevelt? (18:52)

ER:] The first thing yes, I think it is, of course, I think he has a harder time than he um uh-- to stand up against it, at times, than he would acknowledge because I have watched him sometimes and his hands will tremble al--and he will really get quite red in the neck [Ben Grauer: Yes.] [ER laughs] because he just can't bear it. But he never says anything, and he never lets it appear in his answer which I think is-is most irritating to them but um the only way to take that sort of thing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, I've got another personality who's going to be on our program in a uh few weeks uh who probably as much as anybody else uh in the entertainment field did a terrific job in World War II and has done a terrific job in the Korean War in the entertainment of troops, and that is uh an old friend of Mother's and mine, Mr. Bob Hope. (19:54)

[Ben Grauer:] [Ben Grauer and ER laugh] Oh, Bob. I did a show with Bob in 1933. It was his first commercial.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Is that right?

[ER:] Mhm.

[Ben Grauer:] He was a relatively unknown comedian. I thi--was it *Roberta*? I can't remember the musical comedy. I think the one before that, but he really had a very sm--moderately--he was not a star. [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] And someone took a chance on this comedian and put him on the radio with Shep Fields [1910-1981] and his orchestra and Frank Parker and this new person named Bob Hope. And he didn't uh--buildings didn't tumble. He was just kind of all right, and they had sense enough to say, "This boy will come along," and the rest is history. (20:28)

[ER:] Isn't that wonderful?

[Ben Grauer:] I remember doing uh um-- being Master of Ceremonies at the um White House Correspondents' Dinner in forty-seven in Washington-- forty-six? Yes, it was forty six. And uh Bob Hope had been on uh some business in uh California and his plane was delayed, so I subbed for Bob Hope for about twenty minutes [ER: Oh! Oh dear!] until his plane came in. [All laugh] He was very gracious, he took over, and-and the dinner came alive. [ER laughs]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] What's the longest period of uninterrupted broadcasting that you've ever had to go through? (20:58)

[Ben Grauer:] In Chicago in forty-four, I think at the convention. Yes. There was some hitch in the proceedings, or there--I think that crisis had developed and it was about a vice presidential nomination,

[Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and that's what it was as a matter of fact. That's right. (21:14)

[Ben Grauer:] And uh--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And whether Mr. Truman or-or Mr. Douglas--

[Ben Grauer:] Douglas, or there was a Burns possibility for a while [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.], but I think you're right, Truman or Douglas, and, of course, the Wallace thing had blown up. [Elliott Roosevelt: That's right.] And uh the uh the boys had to get together and talk this over.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] In the smoked-filled rooms.

[Ben Grauer:] In the smoke-filled little place down below the platform there. And so there was a lot of ad-libbing to be done. And uh I got the mic, and I got a sheaf of yellow teletype bulletins and uh some fill-in material from the Chicago Chamber of Commerce and a back copy of *St. Nicholas*, I think.

(21:46)

[ER:] Oh dear!

[All laugh]

[Ben Grauer:] I just kept going. I found something to talk about. And then when I was really getting dry, H.V. Kaltenborn had been elsewhere gathering material, and he popped around the corner and I signaled him frantically and he sat down, and then-then we were on for another eighteen hours! (22:01)

[All laugh]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, Mother, I think we have to let Ben take over at this point for a few messages from our sponsors. And then I'd like to come back in order to have a closing together.

(Break 22:15-22:30)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Ben Grauer, and uh this time I think it's time for Mother and I to leave and uh go elsewhere, but uh I do want to say myself how happy I am that we're back together. I date back almost as far as you do in radio, [Elliott Roosevelt laughs] and I uh hope that uh we'll have a

wonderful association together in uh this radio series, and I know that Mother wants to add a word at this point. (23:00)

[ER:] Well, I am particularly glad, of course, to have you Mr. Grauer on the program with us. I can't hope for as long an association um as some of those you've mentioned here today. [ER laughs] But I hope that as long as it can possibly be, we will be together, and I thank you very much for coming. (23:23)

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