

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

January 31, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the advisability of accepting the Chinese into the United Nations. In the interview segment, ER's guest is William Lawrence, *New York Times* journalist and author of *Hell Bomb*.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, William Lawrence

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother now we come to a very interesting part of our program according to what our listeners write in, and that is the uh questions that they write in that they want you to answer. The question today concerns the Korean Ceasefire uh Committee of the U.N., uh which is now admitted uh complete failure. The Chinese Communists did not recognize its legality and refuse to consider its recommendations. Their price is U.N. recognition of communist China. Do you still believe in the effectiveness of the U.N., and what step is to be taken now?

[ER:] Well yes-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Sort of a large question.

[ER:] Oh I still believe in the effectiveness of the U.N. It can't be destroyed by having um either the USSR or communist China say that they don't regard it uh or any part of it as legal. If all the rest of us regard it as legal why um uh there is a preponderance of opinion in opposition. (1:11)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah.

[ER:] I happen to feel of course that um now the United Nations has a great moral obligation. I don't think that we can allow communist China to actually be recognized as a member of the League until China as a whole has a government and um certainly as long as communist China is fighting against United Nations forces, it would be utterly impossible for it to meet the qualifications that are required of a member of the League.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm-mhm.

[ER:] So that I think that demand is foolish. I do think however that it would be well for the Ceasefire Committee to continue trying. I cannot help believing that if they present a really reasonable um workable suggestion, that it would not- that it would be impossible to get uh some kind of deliberation um on the suggestion. Now um- (2:38)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well could I ask a question right at this point? Uh do you think uh that it would be in the bounds of possibility for the Ceasefire Committee to make a direct uh- uh instructed uh proposal that communist China uh would be given a seat? Maybe not displacing nationalist China's seat in the U.N. uh if they immediately ceased fire and withdrew their troops from Korea and allowed Korea to have a U.N. uh free election supervised by U.N. personnel?

[ER:] I don't think China could have two votes in the U.N. That would give them a preponderance of votes which would not be fair to the other nations.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well the Soviet Union has three votes.

[ER:] Yes, but I think um, I think there would be objection uh to that arrangement at the present time because uh the votes uh of China are not unified. They're not um- China is not at present a nation. It's just torn apart uh-- two different factions. (3:57)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Do you, do you think that uh--

[ER:] I think it might be--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] -uh nationalist China should be replaced then?

[ER:] Not at present. I think that what should happen really perhaps um is to request uh a getting together um of the Chinese eventually uh so that you know that you're dealing with one China. You see, this civil war in China has been going on for many, many years. And it's a long while um since China has been really unified. Now, everyone hoped that under Chiang Kai-shek that was going to be done.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] And then it was never done. And now uh the nationalist um Chinese um are driven off the mainland and are in Formosa. But it's not up to us I don't think or even to the United Nations, to say who shall eventually represent China. I would feel personally, but I don't know at all that the government would agree with me, and it would make great difficulties I imagine in the Security Council if the um Chinese were just removed for the time being as a whole. (5:32)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[ER:] I certainly don't think you could recognize the um uh the other Chinese people, and uh have uh two groups-

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah.

[ER:] -representing. It's a very difficult question--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Let, let me ask you--

[ER:] tied up with their own final uh settlement of their own difficulties.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well uh, what, what in essence is the picture today? Isn't it that uh communist China, which to a large extent the communist government of China controls a large part of uh the Chinese mainland anyway?

[ER:] Yes.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh now, uh they are at war with the United Nations. Is that true? (6:20)

[ER:] Yes, I'm- apparently that is--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now--

[ER:] I-I don't know dear, it's very difficult to say because you see the troops in Korea are not Chinese armies. They are volunteers.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's uh--

[ER:] That's the fiction. (6:34)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Is uh, is that still the fiction they maintain?

[ER:] That fiction is maintained because of the treaty with Russia. Uh the treaty with Russia uh required that Russia come to the aid of China if she was attacked in Manchuria. Now, if her armies- if it's really the Chinese armies attacked in Korea, it might well be that China could demand that Russia come to her aid. So the fiction has always been maintained that their- that the troops- the Chinese troops at present in Korea are not Chinese army but volunteers.

[ER:] So I don't really know [Elliott Roosevelt: Alright] if they consider themselves at war with the United Nations or not.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Uh are the members of the United Nations required to participate in the U.N. uh police forces?

[ER:] Members of the United Nations uh are not obligated at present um because there's been no definite set up of a police force of any kind. Um they uh there's no agreement on that at all.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt Overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] So that all the U.N. forces--

[ER:] Can do is ask for volunteers.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] are voluntary--

[ER:] That's it.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] uh well they're not really voluntary because it's not individual volunteering. It's uh it's--

[ER:] No, it's paid.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] the government's committing--

[ER:] Governments.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] certain of their troops.

[ER:] Yes. (8:01)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now, um I was wondering if um uh why there has not been consideration given to uh the passing of uh a resolution or act or what have you within the General Assembly of a required

participation on the part of U.N. nations in a formal police force? Why has that not come up and been argued out so as to smoke out the Soviet position?

[ER:] It's come up um a number of times. You see the Secretary General [Trygve Lie] asked for a very small police force originally. Um in the last, in the General Assembly before this one, not this last one but the one before um and the idea of his police force was really only a beginning. But it was that he should have armed guards who would go with missions of the U.N. and who would um try to prevent anything happening such as happened to Count Bernadotte [Folke Bernadotte] and who would guard papers and that type thing. Now that was not voted for. There came up all sorts of difficulties. The cost, [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] Uh the various- it wasn't really very costly- but who should um how should they be provided by volunteers or by uh- and a million and one things came up. And they were never really, it was never voted.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That was before the Korean difficulty.

[ER:] Oh long before. Well over a year ago.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now you've got, you're faced with a, a real case of a country or a government, uh a quasi-government, at war with the United Nations, or representatives of the United Nations. Why isn't it time for the United Nations then to take legal action to require its members to come to the support of its volunteers? (10:01)

[ER:] Well you see there is in session um the um military uh committee that has been trying over a very long period uh to find an agreement on um ordinary weapons. Leaving the atomic weapons out, and um to make a general agreement uh on what um should-- would be possible to give uh into the hands of the U.N. and what nations would agree to keep outside. But there's never been the slightest chance at agreement. Never. And that's one of the weaknesses you see, because had that been agreed to [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] um we always said that you couldn't agree to that until you settled the question of atomic energy, because that was the overall ruling weapon and therefore unless that was settled the other things couldn't be settled.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All right.

[ER:] And as they would never agree on any of the suggestions for atomic energy, they never could really agree. This few little things were worked out I think [Elliott Roosevelt: Yeah.] to the point, which might have been agreed on, but never any broad picture. (11:19)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now we just have one second to take up the last part. Do you believe that a uh really large scale call could be made on the U.N. to provide on the U.N. members uh who are of a mind to provide it to provide uh great numbers of um of personnel and then call on the United States to provide the arms and the training?

[ER:] I think one could do that. I don't know what the response would be. It's very difficult to um uh awaken a great sense of interest when the nations that have to be called upon are thousands of miles away.

[Elliott Roosevelt and ER overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] And uh--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now I see that our time.

[ER:] We might make it, but I don't know.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yeah. I, I see that our time is running out and I'm afraid we have to pass on to uh the commercials that make this program possible.

(12:13-12:24)

[ER:] Today there are many theories and facts that people talk about in connection with the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb. And they also discuss whether to use it or not to use it, what they will do and what they won't do. The more facts we can gather about this weapon, the better these weapons rather, the better able we will be to make our decisions about the advisability of the use to be made of them and their effectiveness. Mr. William Lawrence has written a book, very recently published, entitled *Hell Bomb*, which gives us facts. So today I've asked him to tell us of his knowledge and findings that he's made. I'm happy to introduce to you Mr. William Lawrence. (13:25)

[William Lawrence:] Thank you, Mrs. Roosevelt.

[ER:] Thank you. Now Mr. Lawrence uh I know that our listeners would like to know something about you personally. I think you worked on the original atomic project, didn't you?

[William Lawrence:] Yes, Mrs. Roosevelt. I had the privilege-- the great privilege- of being invited by the War Department to go behind the scenes when the making of the atomic bomb was still one of the great top secrets. And uh to see everything and to prepare reports to be held until such time as the secret will be made known to the American people and to the world. And so I went there all over the various plants and saw the first test in New Mexico and then I flew with the atomic bomb over Japan. And uh when the reports, when the President announced the dropping of the bomb and the press was given all the background material, they were all prepared by me in advance. (14:39)

[ER:] Well then there isn't any one, I should say, who had more background. Now will you um tell us a little bit about uh your how you-- your book, and what you want to accomplish with the book.

[William Lawrence:] You see, Mrs. Roosevelt, I think the purpose of my book is best summarized in a quotation from Professor Robert Bacher of the California Institute of Technology which I publish at the beginning: "The democratic system depends on making intelligent decisions by the electorate. Our democratic heritage can only be carried on if the citizen has the information with which to make an intelligent decision." End quote. That was the purpose of my book. I had known about the hydrogen bomb for many-- for five years. In fact we knew about it when we were discussing its possibility way back in Los Alamos before the first atomic bomb was tested. And uh we couldn't talk about it. And then suddenly it was sprung upon the American people just out of a clear sky. They had barely gotten themselves acquainted with the atomic bomb when they heard that we were planning to make a bomb a thousand times as powerful. And then there was considerable confusion and fear because scientists told us that this hydrogen bomb could extinguish all life on earth. And I felt that panic is even a worse danger to us today than an atomic bomb because I-- the facts show that Russia does not have atomic bombs in sufficient quantities, really, to threaten us right now, but that if we thought that she had and we allowed ourselves to-to uh be panicked. Why I-I felt that, that, that was more dangerous. So, having been committed behind the scenes and having learned some of the basic facts about the hydrogen bomb I felt it was my social and obligation as a citizen to tell the American people what the facts are because after they learned the facts I felt that they would be less likely to give way to panic. Because the book was really uh written not to frighten but to enlighten. And that the-the facts as they are available today in so far as they can be told

would show the American people that they have less to worry about than a superficial knowledge would indicate. (17:37)

[ER:] Now why do you call it the Hell Bomb?

[William Lawrence:] Well that is a popular term given to it. It was first of all called the hydrogen bomb, and then was abbreviated to H-Bomb, and then became popularly known as the Hell Bomb, because in the early days following the President's announcement a great many scientists came along and told us that this bomb was the ultimate weapon, that it could extinguish all life on earth and therefore was named the Hell Bomb. (18:12)

[ER:] Well nothing of course is ever ultimate because man is always striving for a little more knowledge and a little more. But, it's ultimate I suppose for the moment, at whatever the-the um the wherever our knowledge of the moment stops that's ultimate I suppose.

[William Lawrence:] That's exactly it Mrs. Roosevelt. But the point is that after I had uh stated the known facts it so happens that uh we have the advantage for a number of years in this. And because of that I feel that the Hell Bomb would really be a sort of a heaven sent thing for the democracies. In particular for us the leading democracy in the world, to maintain peace because I believe that the weapon, right now, in its present stage of development, uh is really a deterrent against war rather than something that would-- that threatens the extinction of life on earth.

[ER:] Well, it is a deterrent against war I imagine as long as we don't use it, uh--

[William Lawrence:] As long as we don't use it. I mean the way I feel is we certainly aren't going to make aggressive war. We as a nation never have made aggressive war. But we are making this weapon to prevent other nations from making aggressive wars. (19:44)

[ER:] But I agree with you entirely on that. But how are we going to persuade other nations that that is so?

[William Lawrence:] Well that is our duty I think of personalities like yourself for instance. We have got to tell them that that is our purpose. We are merely making these weapons to defend democracy and to prevent World War III. And uh we not only are relying on these physical weapons, I believe, we are mainly relying really on the strength of democracy as such. In other words, that the greatest weapons of all are the weapons and the-- in the realm of ideas,

[ER:] [unclear term] (20:25)

[William Lawrence:] in the realm of the spirit. But that we cannot rely only on the spiritual that we must have all our defenses in order, physical as well as spiritual.

[ER:] Well I would agree with you sir, but I think the people have got to know a little bit more about what can be accomplished. Uh what, for instance, can you tell in your book that um will give the people a sense of confidence?

[William Lawrence:] Well you know in the first place, I think that mystery is the most frightening thing of all. If you have a something behind a curtain- same way as the Iron Curtain- or any curtain, a silken curtain, it frightens people because they wonder what is behind it. If you raise the curtain and show 'em, they realize that there is nothing in the world that the human mind and the human spirit cannot cope with. It has coped with many other frightening things before. Therefore, I try here in this book to raise the

curtain of mystery. To show them that there really that-that there are certain facts that are well known. Known everywhere-- to the Russians, to all European scientists, to scientists everywhere. And that these facts are not so, so mysterious that the average citizen, without any scientific background could still understand them. And that's what I tried to do here. I try to give them the facts, in confidence that a free people allowed to think, once given the facts, can make decisions that will be intelligent and that will be constructive and that will also uh provide-- for uh provide an antidote against panic and hysteria.

[ER:] Well I have many more question I want to ask you but, but just a minute. We have to let our announcers have a chance to speak.

(Break 22:27-22:39)

[ER:] Now Mr. Lawrence in your book you give a background I understand for the whole of atomic energy and for the A-Bomb um simply for those of us who are rather ignorant and don't know a great deal about these scientific facts, but could you on this program just tell us um one or two of the effective ways of using both the A-Bomb and the H-- the Hell Bomb.

[William Lawrence:] I shall be very glad to Mrs. Roosevelt. You see, uh the, the uh the Hell Bomb, so called the Hydrogen Bomb uh can be made much larger than the much more powerful than the A-Bomb. They depend on two entirely different principles- opposing principles- the, the A-Bomb, the so-called ordinary Atomic Bomb we used over Japan depends on splitting atoms and certain types of atoms and, and in the splitting, it just like splitting a bottle containing liquid. The liquid flows out a way. It spilled out. And the same way if you conceive of the atom as a small bottle and uh the containing a liquid, which we call energy in very, compressed, condensed form and you break the bottle and the energy runs out. And the- the- the thing about splitting atom is, is that so much of it, if you conceive let's say of a bottle containing a quart, and out comes a million quarts, you know? Uh because the-the-the liquid in it would be so compressed that really uh after you split a bottle the amount of liquid would be so much bigger than the actual size of the bottle.

There is tremendous energy in these atoms, but in the case of the Hydrogen Bomb, instead of splitting atoms you fuse them. You combine them. And in this case also there is a tremendous amount of energy liberated. And in the case of the Hydrogen Bomb you uh you use uh a substance, which is present in all water, which is called heavy hydrogen. And that can be made as I say the ordinary A-Bomb has no, has a definite limit of size. And the H-Bomb has no limit at all. So uh and uh so, therefore, it can be made thousand times more powerful. Now it can be made into two types. It can be made in a type which I call non-rigged and the other one is rigged. If you can rig it for radioactivity that means it can give off invisible rays, like X-rays that will be so powerful that they could go off in a cloud and wherever it went it would destroy life. That would be that is the danger that scientists talk about. But it can also be non-rigged, in which the radioactivity, would be though it is a thousand times more powerful, the radioactivity would be no more, no greater than the ordinary A-Bomb. But an H-Bomb would be large enough to destroy any city in the world. (24:57)

What I point out that in a sense, the H-Bomb would be a much more moral, humane weapon, because the A-Bomb is good only in strategic bombing against cities. That is, against industrial cities. Now if you bomb an industrial city, you kill a lot of innocent civilians, men, women, and children. The H-Bomb can be used as a tactical weapon against armies so you wouldn't have to use bombs against cities, and against civilians. You would use it; you would use weapons the way you used them before in war, against, against armies, and it is accepted of course that uh that uh it is the duty of any nation defending herself against an attacker to try and destroy the armies of the aggressing-- of the aggressor nation. Of course any destruction of life is- is naturally immoral. But uh one is- is much more immoral.

The destruction of civilians, with no combatants, is much more immoral than let's say the destruction of combating troops. (27:14)

[ER:] I've never been quite sure whether if we invented a weapon which could be used against governments, it might not be more effective.

[William Lawrence:] Well if you could this, if you could uh manage to have the weapon single out certain groups of people who are responsible--

[ER:] No, I-I mean- I mean actually government cities from which uh uh it emanated because um I-I-- some how it seems to me that the people of the world today want peace, and yet in some curious way we cannot arrange to sit down around a table and do the discussing before we've killed a lot of our young people in the different nations, instead of afterwards! And what I would love to have is something which would oblige us to sit down around the table first instead of second!

[William Lawrence:] Well that's exactly it Mrs. Roosevelt. I think that this bomb will do that. It will oblige us. I believe that a weapon, the possession of a weapon such as this, and its fortunate possession by us who are not planning and do not want war.

[ER:] No, I think we are government and all a peace loving people in this country.

[William Lawrence:] I believe so. I think there can be no question about it. And I think even the, even the totalitarian governments realize that. But they-they for some reason or another they do not want to tell their own people that that is the case. In fact they paint a picture of us as, as war mongering nations. But I believe that uh while we are waiting really for some almost you might say miracle to happen so that the totalitarian uh the rulers of the totalitarian nations would see the light that in the meantime we have a physical weapon to act as a deterrent against their any-any temptation they might have to start a war. (28:50)

Therefore, when we talk about the great potentialities of this bomb, I feel that it is really something that would never be used because no body-- certainly we are not going to use it. And we are in the, that's one of the things I'm telling in my book that we are in the lead right now and we shall be in the lead according to all the known facts, for at least another five years [ER: yes.]. In other words, it gives us time; it gives us time to prepare not only our physical but also our spiritual defenses.

[ER:] And- and to use our diplomatic possibilities.

[William Lawrence:] Exactly. Because as long as we can stave off an actual global war, there is always hope. There is always, there will be always time for- for the-- for the drastic, for the most drastic groups. But as long as there is possibility to stave it off, the longer we stave it off the greater the chance, the greater is the hope I think that we'll stave it off for good.

[ER:] But let me ask you something: I would concede that in practically all the democracies that I know neither the government nor the people really want war. They always seem to be-- being forced by the fear of the totalitarian government, which does completely rule over its people without any uh chance for the people to have participation in decisions. Now, uh the other governments seem to be being pushed all the time. Now I-- what I wonder is, is there any way that one can make a demonstration um by taking an area of uh where people had been taken out of it you see, [William Lawrence: Mhm.] and making a barrier, a sort of uh sign of what could happen. Uh for instance, I thought, um uh if a good in an area-- I don't know that this exists, but supposing there was an area of North Korea that was um completely free of people,

um could one uh so restrict the area of result that one could make a demonstration of that kind or is it impossible? (31:56)

[ER and William Lawrence Overlap]

[William Lawrence:] Well, it isn't impossible, but the question is: is it necessary? We have had two, unfortunately two demonstrations. We have had-

[ER:] Yes but people, people don't seem to

[William Lawrence:] the ordinary atom bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and we have shown the devastation that, that one atom bomb, now known as the Model T- an antiquated model, the one we no longer would use, ah and we see what it can do. That one-one weapon could, could destroy about a hundred thousand human beings in a city like Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

[ER:] You- you think those demonstrations should be sufficient?

[William Lawrence:] I think, I think so. I think it's enough because the people of the world know.

[ER:] Well I hope so with all my heart, but I'm um I'm not so sure that they have actually been taken in. But in any case, I want to thank you very much because I think you have given us a great deal today, and I'm very sorry we have to draw this interview to a close. Thank you, Mr. Lawrence.

[William Lawrence:] So am I. Thank you Mrs. Roosevelt.

(32:57)

Transcribed from holdings at Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (FDRL)
File(s): 72-30(81)

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