

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

March 5, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the varying levels of freedom for workers and citizens in countries like Greece, Turkey, Iran, Sweden, France, and Great Britain. In the interview segment, ER discusses the UN's Children Emergency Fund with opera singer Yarmila Novotná.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Yarmila Novotná

[ER:] Good day. This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking. It indeed gives me pleasure to visit with you each day at this time, and I do hope that you enjoy, as I do, meeting my guests here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel in New York. And now I want you to meet Elliott, my son, who will tell you about our plans for today's program.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. Our guest today has the unique distinction of having been the star of an outstandingly successful motion picture without ever having appeared in films before, uh Mademoiselle Jarmila Novotná, who was the star of that tragic film about displaced persons titled *The Search*. Mademoiselle Novotná, however, has long held uh world renown as an opera star. I know our listeners will find her story particularly engrossing. And a listener from New Jersey has written a letter to Mother asking her to express her views on the comparative lot of workers in certain free European countries, as well of those behind the Iron Curtain. But before getting on with the program, a word from our sponsors who make this recorded program possible.

(Break 1:22-1:36)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, I have here a letter from uh a lady in Haskell, New Jersey, who's written in a letter uh in which she's asked a question which I think could stand some clarification. She says, "You speak on your program about the free nations of the world meaning evidently all nations outside the Soviet bloc. Would you please explain the common denominator of freedom between countries like Greece, Iran, and Turkey on one hand and Sweden, Great Britain, and France on the other? Do you really think that the workers in Greece, Iran, and Turkey have more freedom than the workers in Russia and her satellites?"

[ER:] That's, of course, a difficult question. I'm not intimately acquainted with the um the exact amount of freedom given to um the workers in Greece and Iran. But I'm sure that under the form of government of either of those countries um there is not the type of police state that exists in the Soviet. And there is certainly not the compulsion that exists in the economic system of the Soviet. For instance, under the Soviets, everyone must work, it's true everyone must be given a job, and that does mean that everybody gets some pay. But um the fact that uh you must work, and that it is decided for you pretty well, where you work, and you are given coupons, for instance, and told where you, as a worker in such and such a place may buy, does make of the whole of life, a much more regimented life than um, exists in almost any other country I know. Even under the austerity regulations, for instance, in Great Britain which are accepted by the people. I mean, either if they weren't the people would be able to vote their leaders out of office, uh still they are not regimented at all in the way that um you would be in Russia, where you would only be able to go to certain places, and the goods that were available for you to buy, would be curtailed by the actual um coupons that you held.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes, well, I think that I'd like to ask a few questions that come to my mind as a result of this letter. Uh I believe that uh possibly uh there are gradations of freedom and that all is not black and white.

[ER:] No, of course, that's true.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] There are uh variations, for instance, this lady has mentioned three countries, Greece, Iran, and Turkey. Uh in Turkey uh, as I understand it, there is a constitutionally elected government in which all the people participate and there is freedom of movement of any citizen of that country. Uh in Iran, there is what is known as a constitutional monarchy, but in- in effect it is a very shaky uh dictatorship, uh which is run by a group of people who control all of the uh lands in Iran. And the worker in Iran has uh probably the most uh um [ER: New.] uh starvation uh diet that exists anywhere. [ER: Low standard.] low standard that exists anywhere. In Greece, you -- again, you have a constitutional monarchy and elections, and uh the worker does have the opportunity to move with the exception that there is to a certain extent martial law due to the trouble they have had with the -- internally that they have had with their revolution. But uh of those three countries only Iran would not come into the same category and the same common denominator of freedom that uh exists in Great Britain, France, and Sweden. Wouldn't you say that is true?

[ER:] Well, I would say that the democracies of of um the Scandinavian countries were perhaps further developed in the line of um [Elliott Roosevelt: Real democracy.] real democracy.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But that is because there is greater education amongst the masses.

[ER:] There is greater among the masses. I would say -- I would call, even though uh a United States Senator told me he would not, I would call Great Britain a real democracy. He would not call Great Britain that because he says it's a socialist country

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, then uh on that uh score then he would have to call all the Scandinavian countries, uh incl-- and also Holland and also Denmark, uh --

[ER:] Including - including their monarchies.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] All -- uh including their monarchies. They would be socialist countries because they're just as socialized, in fact, more so than Great Britain.

[ER:] I know, but I don't think this gentleman was being as strictly uh careful as that in his analysis. He just made the remark that uh he hoped we would never reach the point where we were uh social [Elliott Roosevelt: Socialized.] socialistic and socialized like Great Britain.

[ER and Elliott Roosevelt overlap]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] To the extent-to the extent of Great Britain well then he would--

[ER:] And that he did not consider that Great Britain was a democracy and that I had to just uh protest just a little because I think uh Great Britain is an outstanding democracy.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I think that the best proof of it is that if uh in all likelihood if the British people in the next general election chose to overthrow the present socialist government that exists there, all of the private capital interests would have restored to them all of their possessions as they existed before this experiment started in Great Britain. (8:09)

[ER:] Yes, I think that would probably happen.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And uh that will uh --

[ER:] But it has to be the will of the people.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And the will of the people will determine the extent to which they are socialized.

[ER:] That's-that's--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Undoubtedly in this country.

[ER:] But I call that freedom.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That is freedom and also it would- it would hold true in this country. If we were to take steps in the direction of socialization of our industries and so forth, it would only come about because the people wanted it that way.

ER: That's the only way it would come about.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But you-have you-- I can't quite determine from you whether you believe uh that in spite of the lack uh of education of the mass in Greece or in Turkey, although I personally believe that in Turkey there is a very true democracy as uh in spite of it being a young democracy.

[ER:] Well, I don't know anything about Turkey, and I know very little um about Greece and Iran from personal knowledge. I only know what I've read and um what I've heard from different people. Um my own feeling would be that even there, there was far more freedom than there is in the USSR, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] or in any of the Iron Curtain.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Although there are many people who would say uh that uh maybe the people of the Soviet Union would prefer to have the iron yoke of uh a police state around their necks because at least they're better fed than they are in Iran.

[ER:] Well, that, of course, is the great question before us today, that is the appeal of the of communism. That um it doesn't matter whether you are free if you can't eat, therefore the important thing is first to eat, and um the appeal that communism is making- it is making strides I think in places like Iran for the calm simple reason that uh the populace doesn't eat.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm, uh well, did you make the statement that the free nations of the world as meaning evidently all the nations outside of the Soviet bloc?

[ER:] Um I think what I meant probably was the free democracies of the world um as against um uh probably meaning primarily those of northern and -- of northern Europe, [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] um and uh not particularly meaning many of the other countries.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, may I ask would you consider most of the South American countries as being members of the free world? Free democracies?

[ER:] Many South American countries are dictatorships, because they lack education, uh they frequently lack um uh a kind of economic system uh that gives a good standard of living to all the people, and um so that there are quite a number that are really dictatorships. (11:21)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Would you classify, for instance, uh Saudi Arabia of the Arab bloc uh as being a free nation?

[ER:] Well, I should say that none of those countries where the people do not have um rights which they actually exercise are free nations. I don't think you can claim them as free nations.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well therefore, in answering this letter, uh you would classify then the free nations as the true democracies where the individual person has the right of freedom of speech and freedom of movement and does not include such nations as Spain and--

[ER:] Yes, but I would also say he must have a right of participation in his government.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] A voice in his government and an election of the government which represents him [ER: A seat.] before the world. All right, well I think that-that probably answers- this answers that lady's question uh sent in from Haskell, New Jersey, and I think that now we have to move on and so well turn the program over to our announcer at this point.

(Break 12:38-12:54)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now, Mother, would you return to your interview with Madame uh Jarmila Novotná?

[ER:] With great pleasure! I want to ask you whether your interest in the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund grew out of your experience in the camp?

[Jarmila Novotná:] Well, in a way yes naturally, because I think that it is a very important, wonderful organization and we should really all of us be able to give as much as we can to it.

[ER:] Are you still active in --

[Jarmila Novotná:] Well, uh only indirectly really, because now uh whenever I get letters from people um asking me where they can send funds and so on, I tell them that that's the organization whom they can turn to [ER: Yes.] But unfortunately, or fortunately, I am so busy this year I just can't do all--

[ER:] Just can't do anything more. Well, I also understand that you are on the board of directors of the Music Research Fund, that I know is an organization studying the effect of music on the sick through therapeutic aid. Is this the same as the organization which Mrs. Lytle Hull heads? She was a recent guest on our program. (14:06)

[Jarmila Novotná:] Oh, I see. Well no, that is not the same organization. Mrs. Lytle Hull's uh organization is the Musician-Musician Emergency Fund, [ER: Yes.] and also she organized uh um uh vet- for the Veteran's Hospital Service, don't you see? And the other Musician Emerg- no,

what is the [ER: Music Research Fund.] Music Research Foundation is something similar but you know a little more scientific I would say.

[ER: Yes.] It was uh started during the war, and because artists -- we all went to the hospitals and sang there and so on. Uh we do not know exactly, or did not know exactly what is good for the patients and what is wrong. Some of them needed some soothing music, the other something which would make them more uh--

[ER:] Stir them up. (14:59)

[Yarmila Novotná:] That's it. And that's um just exactly what this Music Research Foundation is doing.

[ER:] I- I think I remember at the very beginning in Walter Reed Hospital [Yarmila Novotná: Yes, indeed.] there were some people uh who um had small groups [Yarmila Novotná: Yeah.] of um of veterans and tried out different types of music.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Exactly and now it is um progressing quite a lot and many uh surgeons and doctors and everybody's interested in it so that's uh exactly what that is. But naturally, I have been connected with Mrs. Lytle Hull's organization quite a lot too, [ER: Organization too.] because I went to many, many hospitals to sing for the veterans.

[ER:] Now you, you must have had some, some interesting experiences.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh yes!

[ER:] Can you tell me any-any one story about something that happened to a veteran?

[Yarmila Novotná:] You know it was almost as heartwarming as the experience I had in Germany with the children. But because this uh particular instance they told me while I sang I remember it was [Sigmund] Romberg "When I Grow Too Old to Dream." It's a lovely, simple little song and then, one of these uh veterans said, "Oh this was beautiful." Well, I did not know--naturally, I was pleased, but I didn't pay much attention but then the people came to me and said, "You know, this boy was so melancholy, and he would not talk, we could not do anything with him. These are his first words after about six months silence." So I was -- just wonderful

[ER:] Good gracious! That was a- that was really an accomplishment [Yarmila Novotná: Yes, I--] because probably you pulled him out of--

[Yarmila Novotná:] I asked them later, and they told me that he had kept on being, having beautiful--

[ER:] He kept on talking?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Yes, absolutely.

[ER:] Oh, that's wonderful!

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh, it was really.

[ER:] That was really wonderful! Well, I suppose we must come back to your original career, the opera. Uh when and where did you make your debut? (16:58)

[Yarmila Novotná:] Well, you see I'm born in Czechoslovakia, so my first appearance was in Prague in uh the National Theatre, the National Opera House, and I was only-- not even seventeen years old when I sang my first *Traviata*, *Violetta*. That was in 1928.

[ER:] Who encouraged --

[Yarmila Novotná:] Now you know how old I am [Yarmila Novotná laughs].

[ER:] Uh who encouraged you to start?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh, um well, I think I sang almost all my life. When I was a little child I already started. But don't you see, President [Tomáš Garrigue] Masaryk uh was a great um friend of all young people. And uh he-- this wasn't-- this not did not happen immediately in the beginning, but he heard me at the opera and uh encouraged me, or suggested that I should go to Italy and study some more, which I did. And uh from that time I had a beautiful correspondence with old President Masaryk. Um I have some fifty, sixty letters of encouragement. You know, then he would say um indicate some um friends who would take me to museums and so on, and he said how important it is to -- for an artist to have all over education. Not only concentrate on singing, but that we have to know about uh architecture and about uh the old paintings that way we can learn a lot about costuming later and so on, you know. So that was a great help for me in the beginning of my--

[ER:] That's very interesting. And your husband must have had something to do with your career, hasn't he? (18:40)

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh yes, I-I certainly thank him for many other um things because he was um he was a very surreal critic, and I think if we have somebody who- whom we know that that really likes you and loves you, that we take criticism much easier than from some other people [Yarmila Novotná laughs] so that was a--

[ER:] And he helped you really, it was constructive criticism.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Indeed. Very, very constructive, and I'm certainly grateful for that.

[ER:] Probably spurred you on to work. (19:11)

[Yarmila Novotná:] I had other some um -- when I came to sing in Germany, you know, [Gottfried] Reinhardt was um just uh producing his plays there, and um ask me if I would appear in his "Helen of Troy" oper [unclear term] uh operata, which I agreed because that was the first um connection with a really great director. And everything I learned from -- in way of acting I certainly have from him [Yarmilla Novotná laughs]. And--

[ER:] That is wonderful to have had those connections, I think, with--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] You had connection with one other man who had a great influence, I believe.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Indeed, I'm glad that you are bringing that up. Arturo Toscanini, who uh in the musical world really means for us the highest. Well, when I sing in Salzburg, um he selected me to sing in his uh production of "Magic Flute," and I sang-sang my first Pamina there. And naturally, he -- uh these rehearsals, I will never forget because it was such an in-- slow but instructive uh teaching, you know, for all of --you know, for all of us. And then when I came,

matter of fact, he was the one who introduced me here to Edward Johnson. And when I first arrived in 1939, I made my debut with Toscanini in the in Carnegie Hall in the *Ninth Symphony* of Beethoven. (20:52)

[ER:] Oh, that is- that is wonderful record of a career! [Yarmila Novotná laughs]. Well now, I'm sure that you and your husband can't -- haven't been back recently to Czechoslovakia [Yarmila Novotná: No.] because it would be -- you'd be unable to go um--

[Yarmila Novotná:] Matter of fact, the house, which they in '47 allowed us to use not to mix in the administration over the property, but we just lived there that one year and brought a lot of things from America, because it -- as I said before, it was confiscated first by the Germans by then the Russians were there. In 1948 they took it away, closed it, even we can't take anything out anymore.

[ER:] You can't take anything out anymore?

[Yarmila Novotná:] No,

[ER:] You just came out yourselves?

[Yarmila Novotná:] On yes, well--

[ER:] And that's all you could do? With your two children?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Yes.

[ER:] But now--

[Yarmila Novotná:] Well, we really lived here all the time don't you see. I only visited the a couple of times (21:45)

[ER:] Yes, I see you only visited.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Yes.

[ER:] Well now, you have a son and a daughter, and with all your activities in the opera and the, the radio and so on, I wonder how you manage to have any home life with the children?

[Yarmila Novotná:] [Laughs] I almost would like to ask the question at you, Mrs. Roosevelt!
[Yarmila Novotná laughs]

[ER:] You see, I have no little children. I have no little children.

Novanta: Well no little -- well my children are no more smaller really. My daughter is eighteen
[ER: Oh yes.] and starting now to sing herself, and uh my boy is twelve years old, going to school. Well, we still have some little time for home uh life.

[ER:] Home life. Not much!

[Yarmila Novotná:] Not much, indeed.

[ER:] What is your favorite role in the opera?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Well, what shall I say? Maybe still is uh Violetta in *Traviata*, which was my first role, but now since few years, I'm somehow connected with *Rosenkavalier* and Cherubino and such roles. But --

[ER:] Now, do your children love music too, and do they take-take a real interest in practicing?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh yes, they both uh play piano quite well, and uh, oh, they are very musical. And what will come of it, no body knows. But sometimes they love it.

[ER:] But uh they do come and hear you when--

...

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh yes.

[ER:] And take an interest in all you do?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Yes.

[ER:] I should think that would make a difference because it would give you a mutual interest.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Yes!

[ER:] And they would less resent your being away

[Yarmila Novotná:] Well, sometimes they say don't go on this [ER: Trip.] Tour. Stay here and so on. But naturally they are happy when I'm back again [Yarmila Novotná and ER laugh]. (23:18)

[ER:] Well, um I was interested too in what you just said about uh -uh President Masaryk having advised you to have a general education, and that knowing old paintings and so forth would help you in costuming, as um -- have you kept that interest always?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh indeed!

[ER:] You have?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Matter of fact, I advise all young singers to go as much as- as possible to the museum here, you know, because they can learn a lot from old paintings. Just about the periods and style and so on. It's very, very important.

[ER:] Sometimes it seems to me that um uh greater simplicity would help in-in some--

[Yarmila Novotná:] Indeed. I think colors are important, you know, and also we usually should um try to find out about the rest of the um cast, in order not to make it to uh fuzzy and to be simple. One of the picture.

[ER:] I see. Um when - when this opera season comes to an end, do you go then on a concert tour?

[Yarmila Novotná:] Well yes, I should go to South America this year for about two month uh tour. And uh matter of fact, I should have started already in May, but now we had postponed it

because I have to go with Metropolitan Opera on tour, where I'm singing about fifteen, sixteen performances with them. So I think we might, I might start on this tour about the end of May, in South America. (24:58)

[ER:] End of May. Well that's a nice time--

[Yarmila Novotná:] Time. Yes it's--

[ER:] Well, I would like --

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, I'm afraid I have to interrupt again because we are arriving at the end of the time of our program, and I'm afraid we must call this very interesting interview to an end.

[ER:] Well, I hate to have it come to an end, but I want to thank you so much for coming to be here today.

[Yarmila Novotná:] Oh I thank you to asking-- for asking me.

(Break 25:19-25:36)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] And now it's time to close the program and to remind you that you've been listening to the Eleanor Roosevelt Program, which comes to you each Monday through Friday at this same time. And this is Elliott Roosevelt speaking and wishing you all good day.

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