

## THE ELEANOR AND ANNA ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

April 27, 1949 (catalog date)

Description: In this segment, ER discusses the purpose of social security benefits.

Participants: ER

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[ER:] Thank you, Anna. I think it might be a good idea to reexamine the basis and purpose of our social security system. Recently I saw that former President Herbert Hoover had announced that he's against any increase now in social security benefits. Mr. Hoover urged the House Ways and Means committee to go slow on any changes which would increase the tax load, and he said that he feels the Cold War and foreign aid have taxed our economy to the limit of its endurance. Mr. Hoover's statement brought a prompt answer from our social security administrator Arthur Altmeyer [Arthur J. Altmeyer, 1891-1972]. Mr. Altmeyer said he feels that Mr. Hoover's attitude indicates a basic misunderstanding of our American social security system, which, said Mr. Altmeyer, "is the nation's first line of defense against insecurity." Well, I would agree with Mr. Hoover, that we have to watch our economy very carefully and that we have to see that our economy is sound, because one of the things that um some people in this world are watching for is a depression in this country eh and it would be not only bad for us now, but it would be bad for all the rest of the world. But we inaugurated our social security system for the very reason that we believed it was a bulwark against depressions. And I think that is something which Mr. Altmeyer was thinking about and which Mr. Hoover had perhaps forgotten. The quickest way of bringing about a depression is to take away from people suddenly their whole buying power, and such things as um uh pensions for the old--for the old people as uh-s-uh things that are given uh to-- allowances that are given them for unemployment, uh allowances that are given for illness--those things really are our bulwark against people's losing their whole buying power and actually bringing about a depression, so that in reality this system is a most important system to preserve our economy. Now there are uh things that we do that I suppose we might consider were purely money going out and not coming back. Uh for instance our aid to dependent children, our aid to the blind, and yet in our aid to the blind we are usually-- and in our aid to other dependent people--we are usually preparing them to be more self-supporting, less of a drag on the community. And so in a way we are bolstering our whole economy and of course this is not in any way charity, this is something that everybody eh contributes to. And of course the wider coverage we can have, which is one of the things we're asking for over and over again and we know uh very well that our social security system does not yet cover all individuals. We know that we want it to cover everybody so that everybody can have a certain sense of security. And really it is earned by the people themselves because part of it comes out of the employer but part of it comes out of the salary of the employed. I'm reminded of something my husband said in a radio speech in April 1932. When first explaining his program to the nation he said, "These unhappy times call for building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized, but the indispensable units of economic power. For plans that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." That, I think, is what social security does: builds economically from the bottom up. And now back to my daughter Anna in Hollywood.

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