THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

August 9, 1951

Description: In this segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about whether people are, or are not, "war-like."

Participants: ER and Elliott Roosevelt

[ER:] This is Eleanor Roosevelt speaking, our program is coming to you from my living room here at Park Sheraton Hotel in New York City. I am very happy to have this little while with you each day and I hope you enjoy the guest we’ve invited to be with us today. And now for a moment I am going to turn the program over to Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mr. Gian Carlo Menotti, composer of the now well known pieces-- eh uh now well-known pieces such as The Medium and more recently The Consul has recently returned to the United States after spending a year in Italy supervising the filming of his opera, The Medium. We are happy to welcome him to the program today to discuss the new form of entertainment and some of his experiences abroad. Mrs. Roosevelt will introduce Mr. Menotti after she and I as usual discuss a current problem. Right now we will interrupt in order to give our announcer time to say a few words of interest.

[Break 0:59- 1:08]

A lady in the Bronx unidentified in her letter writes that in the Daily News the other day the inquiring photographer had a question which she would like you to answer, Mother. The question was, “Dr. Ralph Bunch has said that there are no war-like people, merely war-like leaders, do you agree with him?”

[ER:] Well I doubt very much that there are any people in the world today who want to go to war, I think uh that uh as far as what he says about war-like leaders, is probably true. They would not say they were war-like leaders, they would simply say that they were statesmen who were looking far enough into the future, uh to feel that certain things were necessary uh and um therefore if it led to war-- um war was necessary. But um I-I’m quite sure that Dr. Bunch is right in that there are no war-like people in the world.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now um what about people like ah the Pakistanis and the Indians who have a fanatic [ER: About their own little feeling about Kashmir] feeling of hatred. Well they have a fanatic feeling of hatred for each other that is age old because of difference of religious background.

[ER:] Well now curiously enough I don’t think they have a fanatic feeling of hatred for each other, they um they have had this religious [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] schism for a long time. But they live together very peacefully for a great many years each observing their own customs and habits. Now they’ve had this tremendous division and partition and great movement of peoples-- refugees from one part of India into Pakistan so far, but um I don’t think that when you talk to them you find that there is except over the question of Kashmir, a very great bitterness between them. They are after all uh people that understand each other’s customs and habits, I don’t find much bitterness. (3.29)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well, uh what would you say about the German people as a people? Uh it seems to me that uh that whenever a leader comes up and starts to trumpet the German people are the leaders of the
world and should be the leaders of the world they-uh the German people immediately react in favor of that type of leadership.

[ER:] Yes that’s because uh I think the German people um have been led um for so long that they accept what people in power say. They don’t analyze it, they don’t um contradict it at all the way we would in this country. And uh so if they are told that they should be leaders of the world and the only way to do it is to conquer the world, they are very happy to go ahead and try and do so. Um but uh I don’t really think that left to themselves, even the German people would want to be constantly be going to war or ever going to war. Um they-they accept that is the inevitable result of feeling that they should be leading the world.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright, but those leaders, uh who are war-like, would they be able to be leaders if the people weren’t in favor of their expansionist ideas? (5:03)

[ER:] Not if they lived in a democratic country, but most of them live in an autocratic country where they or what they say uh is put over on the people whether the people like it or not. If they lived in a country where the people could rise up and say no I’m not going to war um that’s alright. But after all that’s very difficult, now you take the United States, we’re a democratic people but uh we have never actually started an aggressive war since I suppose uh very earliest days even then it was always to defend. We did actually start a war against England, we’re a democratic people but uh we have never actually started an aggressive war since I suppose uh very earliest days even then it was always to defend. We did actually start a war against England, I suppose um though it was because of abuses that England had heaped on us [Elliott Roosevelt: mhm.] and so I don’t think that we have ever been an aggressive [Elliott Roosevelt: yes] um militant people, but we found ourselves in a position where we finally had to go to war and the reason for that was that finally people see that if they do not go to war they are going to be swallowed up by something else, some other group that has gone for and has been a war-like group. Just as now, none of us have a real desire to go to war with the USSR but we know very well that if we don’t stop the USSR the day will come when we are a little island in communist countries and we will be swallowed up. So we know that we have to defend ourselves.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright, you say that uh democratic countries uh do not have a tendency toward a war like attitude. What percentage of the-of the earth’s people that live in democratic regimes where individuals have the right of control of their future [ER: a very small percentage] a very small percentage then uh it’s probably axiomatic then that a very large percentage of the earth’s surface uh has the leadership that could uh very easily turn into uh war like leadership.

[ER:] Well fortunately a good deal of that leadership, a good deal of that population is in nations where uh the leaders have no um organization and no real desire to go to war. But it is true that there is under the Soviet Union an organization uh that is capable of organizing and ready to go to war. [Elliott Roosevelt: and dedicated to--] dedicated to the idea of expansion.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright but now I’d like to take up one other point, uh it is axiomatic also uh that the greatest breeder of war is hunger. Uh if people are hungry and are beaten down, they will be more likely to follow a war like leadership.

[ER:] Yes well two-thirds of the world’s people are hungry. (8:17)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright so that therefore uh to just make a broad statement such as Dr. Bunch made is not really examining the problem at all.

[ER:] I don’t think he was trying to examine the problem, I think he was trying to drive home one point, namely that the people of the world can be driven to war by leaders, by wants, by uh situations that they don’t understand. but they themselves don't want war, they dread war and they are not uh sitting around
waiting to get into a war. They are anxious to find other solutions if they can find them. Uh but alone they can’t find them.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That’s not quite true though, because uh if you take primitive people and there is still a large-large proportions of our earth’s population that are very primitive, take the African tribes. They’re still head hunters they’re a people who uh uh live for the war they can wage against each other.

[ER:] Well that is true of those people that are still in very primitive uh states organizations I suppose.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well aren’t those people then uh very good fodder for war like leadership that it has achieved education and uh knows how to use the uh the tendency of these people to make war?

[ER:] Well, I don’t know about that because uh those groups are not easily organized into the purposes for which the other groups would want to go to war. They have traditional desires of their own and traditional ways of doing things but they are not so easily used for somebody else’s objectives.

(10:13)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] What about a people uh well for instance that in some of our South American countries where I suppose you wouldn't call them primitive people but uh certainly uneducated people [ER: the Indians?] uh not particularly the Indians but the general populations of a country for instance like Bolivia, where uh [ER: The most-- the largest part of their population is an Indian population] and uh they have gone from one uh revolution to another and always there is a constant threat that communism may take hold and communist leadership from within and uh--

[ER:] Well that is because of their conditions in Bolivia, nobody-- after all the big uh um industry there is mining and its always been run as an exploitative ah um I don't myself think that you can't take Bolivia as any sort of an example because nobody has actually um built up conditions in which people can develop very well in Bolivia.

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