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The American Liberalism of Eleanor Roosevelt

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1981

THE AMERICAN LIBERALISM OF ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

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the Faculty of the Department of Government

Western Kentucky University

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Janet Wolfe

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THE AMERICAN LIBERALISM OF ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

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THE AMERICAN LIBERALISM OF ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Janet L. Wolfe

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Directed by: Edward Kearney, Faye Carroll, and John Parker

Department of Government

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A biographical study of the life of Eleanor Roosevelt was undertaken to explore the various obstacles she was required to overcome as she grew to become an influential figure in the world of liberal politics. During the New Deal years her influence was most visible as she traveled across the country and relayed to her husband the concerns of the average man. As a delegate to the United Nations, after the death of her husband, Eleanor's devotion toward attaining a United Nations which would keep peace among all nations and her ability to carry out tasks in a patient and persistent manner, gained for her the respect of all other United Nations delegates. Even later, in the area of Democratic party politics, Eleanor continued to be a living example of the humanitarian ideas for which she and the Democratic Party stood; as such, her symbolic influence served to strengthen the humanitarian image of the Democratic Party and its leaders. Though her influence was little more than a symbolic one, Eleanor Roosevelt stood as proof that politics is more than campaign tactics and party organization; that symbolism and idealism do, in fact, play a large role in determining the popularity and success of a political party.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Eleanor Roosevelt was the first First Lady in American history to become a political figure in her own right. Until she came to the White House, no First Lady had become so involved in the political issues of her time both during and after her husband's administration. Eleanor Roosevelt broke away from the traditional role of the First Lady because she felt it was her duty to contribute in every way possible toward restoring faith in the democratic system among those who had lost hope. It is remarkable that Eleanor never neglected or abandoned those traditional duties expected of her as a wife, mother and First Lady, yet she was able to make herself known and respected within the workings of what had always been "a man's world." One reason for undertaking this study of Eleanor Roosevelt's life in politics is to explore the obstacles she had to overcome in order to be the influential figure that she became. In studying some of the obstacles, this writer has become more familiar with obstacles faced by women in politics in Eleanor's day and in our own. At the same time, I have been made more aware of the contributions that women are able to make simply because they are women. On many occasions, Eleanor was able to carry over into the male-dominated sphere of politics her female touch, her

female compassion, and her very personal humanitarian approach to problems.

The primary reason for undertaking this thesis, however, was to explore Eleanor Roosevelt's influence on liberal politics. How much and what kind of influence did Eleanor really have in liberal politics? In approaching these questions, it can be stated that her influence falls into three categories.

First, she had influence during the New Deal years when her husband was President. Perhaps Eleanor's greatest opportunity to make a significant contribution during those years came from serving as an intermediary between the average man and the government, a role which helped to prevent F.D.R. from becoming isolated within the White House. Eleanor traveled throughout the country visiting with the average man. She communicated simply and directly with people, and she was truly interested in their opinions. People with whom she talked felt that through her their voice was being heard. They developed confidence in her as she used her popular soundings to insure that the President did hear what the people were saying.

Secondly, Eleanor had influence in the sphere of international politics. Serving as a delegate to the United Nations after the death of her husband, Eleanor devoted all her attentions toward attaining a United Nations conducive to the dreams and ideals of F.D.R., which would keep peace among all nations. The mere presence of a Roosevelt in the

United States delegation to the United Nations was enough to gain initial influence for Eleanor; but her skills in communicating, her patience and persistence as a delegate, soon gained the respect of all the other delegates. Her years in the United Nations resulted in the development of an Eleanor Roosevelt whose stature far surpassed her former status as First Lady of the New Deal.

Finally, Eleanor Roosevelt was influential in the area of Democratic Party politics where she symbolized her husband's achievement of making the Democratic Party the majority party in the country. Eleanor was also a living example of the humanitarian ideas which she and the party preached. Much more often than not, she was a far better example of these ideals than were party leaders. As such, she was in a position to strengthen the humanitarian image of the Democratic Party and influence its leaders.

Thus, Eleanor had three springboards of influence on liberal politics in the New Deal and post World War II periods. How she used each will be discussed in the chapters that follow. First, however, we must explore how Eleanor Roosevelt overcame personal and social obstacles to emerge as a political figure in her own right.

CHAPTER II

ELEANOR'S EMERGENCE INTO LIBERAL POLITICS

Being a Roosevelt and neice of a former president, Eleanor was not totally unfamiliar with the life of a political servant. Never was she a direct participant in political life until her husband was elected to the New York State Senate in 1910. Little did she realize at that time that the barriers which separated her from political life would begin to fall, thus allowing her abilities to blossom.

Franklin Roosevelt's election to the New York State Senate meant a move to Albany for his family. For the first time since being married to Franklin, Eleanor would be freed from the dominance of her mother-in-law, who never could treat Eleanor as a mature, independent woman.¹ With the move to Albany came curiosity, independence, and a growing interest in the great game of politics.

The attitude held by Eleanor in the first year at Albany was one of "duty." Any interest in politics she held was because she considered it her duty to be interested in "whatever interested [her] husband."² She made calls daily;

¹Eleanor Roosevelt, The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 65.

²Ibid., p. 66.

she became associated with a variety of people; she entertained Franklin's political associates until late hours; she visited the gallery in the Capitol and listened to business on the floor.

Above all, she was helpful to Franklin. "She did everything quietly and most efficiently."³ Never did the possibility occur to her that she might some day be an active political figure in her own right. It was her intention to serve the interests of her husband in his career of politics. Beyond this, she would devote herself to being a mother to her children and wife to her husband.

Eleanor found an opportunity to strike out on her own when, in 1913, Franklin was appointed Assistant Secretary to the Navy under the Woodrow Wilson Administration.⁴ Much of her activities at first were similar to the dutiful chores of Albany: making calls, entertaining and attending social events. Eleanor's life in Washington was initially much the same, though more rigorous than that in Albany. But through implementation of all the required duties, Eleanor's shyness was slowly being overcome.

With the declaration of World War I, social events and social calls came to a halt in Washington. Eleanor at last struck out on her own. She joined some women in Washington to help provide a number of needed services for men in

³Joseph Lash, Eleanor and Franklin (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 245.

⁴Ruby Black, Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), p. 31.

uniform.⁵ Becoming involved in wartime activities was, for Eleanor, yet another step toward her independence. During this time especially, Eleanor developed her great organizational ability. This was necessary in order for her to devote so much of her time to these activities and still maintain a smooth running household full of frequent entertainment and care of a family.

New obligations now replaced the social and household duties which for so long had been major priorities to Eleanor. She felt the necessity to plunge into wartime activities because it was her duty. But these new activities differed from previous ones because they were an expression of her aptitudes and interests rather than Franklin's.⁶ Wartime service was, above all, her way of helping others in need, not Franklin's.

During the war years Eleanor was involved in volunteer work at the Red Cross canteens which were set up at the Washington rail yards to provide waiting soldiers with soup, coffee and sandwiches. Eleanor was especially remembered for her remarkable accounting system in the small room where the volunteers sold supplies such as cigars, cigarettes, tobacco, postcards, candies to the soldiers at cost. She was labeled by one worker as "the dynamo" behind the canteen service.⁷

⁵Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 87.

⁶Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 287.

⁷Ibid., p. 293.

Aside from canteen duties, Eleanor was pledged to a variety of other wartime activities. When not at the canteen she distributed wool to knitters and collected the finished products; later, having charge of knitting at the Navy Department, she was supervisor of forty units whose captains reported to her. In addition, when Mrs. Daniels (wife of Secretary of Navy) could not be present to preside at the Navy Department to organize for war work, Eleanor presided. She was described by her mother-in-law's sister as "the willing horse and they call upon her at all hours all the time."⁸

The duties of a public official, such as entertaining and attending social events, still confronted Eleanor and she, perhaps unwillingly, continued performing them. As yet, she was still not entirely independent, but the desire to be such was growing. When asked by the Red Cross in May, 1918, to go to England to organize a Red Cross canteen there, she was very much tempted but refused the offer, stating in later years that she was not "sufficiently independent to manage such an undertaking and ... she felt her primary obligation was to stay with her children." In addition, she was sure her family would disapprove.⁹

At this point in Eleanor's life, we are still able to witness her lingering dependency on the traditional family life and an unwillingness to venture out on her own.

⁸Ibid., p. 296.

⁹Ibid., p. 295.

Deep inside her heart, all her actions were still largely motivated by the expectations of others: her grandmother, her mother-in-law, her husband and even her children. Her independent strivings were still in conflict with her deep devotion to and dependency on her family.

In July of 1918 Franklin was sent to Europe on naval business, during which time Eleanor became even more committed to her own activities. Against the will of her mother-in-law, Eleanor left her and the children in Hyde Park for the month of July in order that she might lend her services at the Red Cross canteens for the month. Once again, duty had called her, but the difference lies in the fact that it was because of her own willingness and desire that she answered the call. She spent remarkably long hours at the canteen because, as she explained, "I had nothing else to do," and "I was anxious to keep busy."¹⁰

Besides the long hours contributed to canteen work, Eleanor had the family chauffeur teach her to drive. She also made efforts to learn the skill of swimming.¹¹ In small things as well as large, Eleanor was becoming a more independent person. She was acquiring a deeper sense of self reliance and autonomy, both of which served to prepare her somewhat for the coming crisis point in her life.

The return of Franklin in September of that same year brought more than just Franklin. He was ill with

¹⁰Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 95.

¹¹Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 297.

double pneumonia upon arrival in the United States. While caring for his mail, Eleanor came upon some love letters to Franklin which had been written by her social secretary, Miss Lucy Mercer. Upon realization that Lucy was her husband's lover, Eleanor confronted Franklin with the knowledge and offered him a divorce if he so desired.

A number of matters were considered before Franklin made his final decision regarding the divorce. First, he had to consider what the consequences might be for his children were he and Eleanor to be divorced. In addition, it was said that Sara, his mother, made the threat to discontinue all financial aid to Franklin if he did not give up Miss Mercer.¹² Louis Howe, F.D.R.'s campaign manager, pointed out possible negative consequences for his political career should divorce take place. Besides these considerations, Franklin was aware that Lucy Mercer, a devout Catholic, would have been condemned by her religion had she married a divorced man.¹³

Whatever the reason, the decision was made that Franklin and Eleanor remain married, but never again would the two behave the same toward one another as they had before this occurrence. Until this point in Eleanor's life all her thoughts, all her actions, all her attention had centered around the man she loved. She had lived and loved for him and now "the bottom had dropped out of her world."¹⁴

¹²Ibid., p. 310.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

This event convinced Eleanor as never before that she must strike out on her own as an independent personality.

With the end of the war in November, 1918, Eleanor shifted her attentions to the wounded who were being returned to military hospitals. She took charge of the Naval Hospital's Red Cross recreation room. She made daily visits to hospital wards, sometimes with gifts, sometimes just kind and caring words. In addition she reviewed requests from families and friends of the veterans.¹⁵

One such request was received from a chaplain who asked that she and others of the Red Cross Auxiliary visit St. Elizabeth's Hospital. There were approximately 400 mentally disturbed or insane Navy men there. Most were shell shock patients.¹⁶

In spite of her initial fears about the insane, Eleanor went. By doing so she discovered the extreme patient neglect in St. Elizabeth's due mainly to inadequate staff assistance. She brought these facts to the attention of Secretary of Interior Frank Lane.¹⁷ Lane appointed a committee to investigate the inadequacies which Eleanor had reported. The committee testified before a congressional committee. As a result, appropriations for the hospital were increased.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 299.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Tamara K. Hareven, Eleanor Roosevelt: An American Conscience (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 16.

Even though Secretary Lane at first feared taking action, Eleanor persisted in her struggle. Her initial fear of the insane had turned to compassion and pity for their condition. Her one-time withdrawn, insecure attitude was becoming a confident one. Through confidence and persistence she completed the task she had set out to complete; it was these same qualities which proved to be so valuable throughout Eleanor's life of humanitarian endeavors.

During the Albany and wartime years, Eleanor made her entry into public life. This period brought a great deal of freedom from her domineering mother-in-law and a change from a total private and family commitment to a public activity commitment. The second stage of Eleanor's political emergence was largely the result of discovering the affair between her husband and another woman. From all of this came the determination to pursue her own interests. It was the beginning of her own distinctive political style: one characterized by serving those in need in as direct and personal a way as possible. She would remain loyal and helpful to Franklin, but she was more determined than ever to pave an independent road for herself. In the 1920s she discovered that she could be a political figure in her own right, and an influential one at that.

The 1920 campaign was the first national election in which women could vote. Franklin had been selected as vice-presidential candidate for the Democratic Party. What better way could a candidate secure votes than by having his wife

alongside to campaign for the female voters? With that strategy in mind Franklin asked Eleanor to join him on the campaign train. It was on this train that Eleanor's previous resentment and dislike of Campaign Manager Louis Howe blossomed into a close friendship. It is Howe who is held responsible for Eleanor's introduction into politics.¹⁸

Louis Howe had been able to sense Eleanor's lack of confidence and her desire to be useful in her husband's political career. He was aware of the disappointments which had brought loneliness to her life. At the same time, Howe realized the qualities in Eleanor--warmth, sincerity, organizational ability, stamina--all of which could prove to be valuable to her husband's political career. Howe told her these things, all at a time when she desperately needed to hear them. He was able to communicate with Eleanor. He explained political strategies. He asked her opinions and criticisms of campaign issues and of her husband's speeches. He taught her to handle the press good naturedly and to laugh with and be at ease with them, rather than allowing their remarks to upset her.

With a boost from Louis Howe, Eleanor's interest in and knowledge of politics was broadened; her self-confidence was strengthened; and her sense of humor came into existence. Though Franklin and the Democratic ticket lost the national campaign that year, Eleanor Roosevelt, in a sense, won. She

¹⁸Ibid., p. 25.

came to identify her abilities and the importance she could play in a political life.

After the 1920 election the Roosevelts resumed their residency in New York. By this stage of her life Eleanor had come to know her own mind and was determined to use it. She would help her husband when asked, but she would also lead a life of her own. She was no longer willing to accept a subordinate position to her mother-in-law, nor did she feel obligated to perform a particular duty because it was expected of her. She had determination to be fully involved with a job where she could help improve the conditions of something or someone.

Eleanor became involved with activities in progressive organizations such as the newly formed League of Women Voters, whose missions were reform of the political process and securing better working conditions for women and children. She referred to her League activities as her "baptism in politics." Eleanor was first asked by the League to make a study of national legislation of interest to League members. Hesitantly, she agreed to take on the responsibility with the assistance and guidance of a lawyer, Miss Elizabeth Read, who helped to improve her skills.¹⁹

By this time Eleanor was becoming more than an observer of political activity; she was becoming involved in her own political activities rather than following and standing in the background of her husband's political activities.

¹⁹Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 112.

In 1921 Eleanor attended the League of Women Voters state convention in New York where she explained to delegates her responsibilities with Miss Read in the legislative work that was being done. These responsibilities soon grew in number, and heated issues were being touched upon by the League. For example, the League members, rather than simply following the progress of bills, took action to sponsor a bill of their own. They also spoke out strongly in favor of the League of Nations as necessary for prevention of war. Eleanor was involved in preparation of resolutions to counter the tactics of anti-League politicians.

Though careful to avoid issues which could be considered disturbing to her husband's political standing, Eleanor sometimes spoke her mind on such touchy issues. Much of the time her statements were blown up by the press, but Franklin's temperament regarding such matters was more often one of amusement than fear of being adversely affected. In fact, he served to coach her on a number of occasions and she, with much pleasure, made use of the tactics he taught her.

Though by this period of her life Eleanor was very definitely developing her own interests, she still held great concern for and willingness to contribute to her husband's career. In the summer of 1921, Eleanor's loyalty to Franklin was put to the test. It was then that Franklin became crippled with polio. His activities in the political world suddenly came to a halt. Eleanor eliminated the

majority of her activities in order to care for Franklin. She described events in the early part of Franklin's illness as one of the "most trying" times of her life.²⁰ It was not only that her own interests and activities were halted by her husband's illness and incapacities. Franklin's mother was determined that her son should lead a secluded, invalid life at Hyde Park until he died. Eleanor, of course, felt exactly the opposite. It was her feeling, as well as that of Franklin's doctor, that he should make an effort to lead, as far as possible, a normal life, and to take part in the activities in which he had always held interest.²¹

Under the persuasion of Eleanor and Louis Howe, Franklin made the decision to remain as active as possible in politics. His mother lost that battle and Eleanor won. By successfully urging Franklin not to retreat into dependency, Eleanor had, albeit indirectly and unknowingly, helped to shape the future of liberal politics in America. Moreover, Eleanor was to discover that helping Franklin often presented opportunities to broaden her own political opportunities and to become an important figure in her own right.

Louis Howe felt the most important thing to assure Franklin a successful political career in the future was by keeping his name circulating in the political arena. With this in mind, Howe strongly encouraged Eleanor to become actively involved, especially in the Democratic Party, so

²⁰Ibid., p. 117.

²¹Black, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 48.

that the F.D.R. name would continue to be alive and in demand. Howe convinced Eleanor, who was by no means convinced that she was capable of accepting such an undertaking, that as her duty to Franklin she should set out to keep his name spinning. By describing this task as her "duty," Howe persuaded Eleanor to accept the responsibility.²² As in her many previous undertakings, Eleanor accomplished what she set out to accomplish. Not only did she succeed in keeping her husband's name in the light; she also made a name for herself.

The major vehicle of importance in keeping Franklin's name in motion was the New York Democratic Party. Upon the urging of Howe, Eleanor joined the New York Democratic State Committee. Shortly afterward she was asked to preside at a fund-raising luncheon for the women's division of the Democratic State Committee. By accepting this invitation Eleanor undertook her first obligation with a political party as well as her first experience in speaking to a sizeable crowd of people.²³

Obviously the committee liked Eleanor because it was not long before she was asked to serve as chairman of the Finance Committee for the women's division of the Democratic Party.

²²Ibid., p. 50.

²³Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 121.

Eleanor's activities within the state Democratic Party became regular. With the help of active members of the women's division, such as Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook, she quickly learned the issues and goals of the committee.²⁴ Her ability to comprehend quickly made her contributions to the party quite valuable.

Not only were Eleanor's contributions to the Democratic Party labeled valuable by her co-workers; she too described her new activities as being "very satisfactory" because she was "acquiring pride in doing a semi-professional job."²⁵

By this time in her life, Eleanor was becoming involved in activities she enjoyed and associating with the people she enjoyed. She was finding herself becoming more interested in her co-workers than in the old social associates "who were busy doing a variety of things but were doing no job in a professional way."²⁶

It was obvious that Franklin was confident of Eleanor's ability to succeed in this new realm of activities. It was he who urged her to begin work on behalf of the Democratic Party in local areas, most especially around their home in Dutchess County, New York. These activities were invaluable in familiarizing Eleanor with the methods and workings of practical party politics. She would not only

²⁴Ibid., p. 121.

²⁵Ibid., p. 123.

²⁶Ibid.

be able to speak for her causes, she would know how to use party machinery as well.

Franklin's strategy was one of acquiring strong partisan support from the local level. Until that particular time, the Democratic Party had been rather weak in the upstate New York area, but Franklin felt that, with vigorous, systematic work, the Republican majority in that region could be diminished. Eleanor carried out the tireless work required by the strategy which had been laid out by Franklin. As Joseph Lash describes, "Franklin was the strategist and Eleanor the chief of troops at his command."²⁷

One of Eleanor's first tasks was to organize the women in Dutchess County. This, of course, required more public speaking and appearances than she had been accustomed to. With the advice and criticism of Louis Howe she became a more fluent, smooth-flowing speaker, and therefore much more successful in acquiring support for her causes.

In 1922 Eleanor continued her practical work in politics when she, for the first time, took part in campaign work for a particular candidate. Franklin was backing Al Smith for re-election to the governorship in New York; and when he began mobilizing support for upstate New York, Eleanor, of course, became "his most tireless worker."²⁸ She followed his instructions and, though most of her

²⁷Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 376.

²⁸Ibid.

speechmaking was unoriginal campaign rhetoric, her simplicity and honesty made it all sound quite original.

It was during this campaign that Eleanor got her first glimpse of true party politics. When she came to witness, for example, the buying of votes, especially at the local levels, she was, putting it mildly, less than pleased. Rather than surrender in disgust, though, Eleanor was one to work that much harder against these practices.²⁹

Though well coached by such experts as Nancy Cook, Marion Dickerson, Louis Howe and Franklin as to the campaign rhetoric, issues to discuss, issues to avoid, and Democratic Party goals, by the end of the 1922 campaign Eleanor had developed in her own mind what the goals and principles of a political party should be. After experiencing close work with party leaders and candidates, she now had a clear view of party politics. In some ways she was frustrated by the political games, but in her own mind she was aware of the importance of working with the system and working through the system to accomplish desired goals. She was quickly and diligently learning to do both.

That same year (1922) Eleanor became associated with Ms. Rose Schneiderman, director in New York of an organization known as the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), a militant women's organization formed to "aid women in their efforts to organize and secure better working conditions,"

²⁹Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 337.

such as the forty-hour work week, abolition of child labor and minimum wages.³⁰

In spite of strong opposition by her mother-in-law, Eleanor went to work for the WTUL and, with Ms. Schneiderman's instruction, became knowledgeable in the area of unionism. Assisting in raising of finances for the purchase of WTUL headquarters, organizing and instructing evening classes for women at the headquarters, Eleanor became a strong advocate of WTUL objectives. She had no hesitations about using her influence in other organizations, such as the Democratic Party and the League of Women Voters, to gain support for WTUL causes. Not only did she gain support for WTUL causes from other organizations, she gained support from her husband as well. Much credit has been given to Eleanor for Franklin's strong position in favor of unionism during his presidential years. He spent many hours with WTUL leaders in the early 1920s and, because of that, was able to comprehend and empathize with their goals.³¹

The increasing contacts Eleanor was making with women's organizations must have forced her to reevaluate her traditional view of a woman's place and position. By no means did she become a militant member of women's rights organizations. She did, however, revise her previous position that a woman should remain in the home. By the time

³⁰Ibid., p. 378.

³¹Frances Perkins, The Roosevelt I Knew (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 32.

of her involvement with the state Democratic Party, the League of Women Voters, and the WTUL, Eleanor had already raised a family and had served the conventional role of a wife. Her emphasis at that point was to stress the responsibilities of women rather than their rights. This was consistent with her tendency to link helping others with a sense of duty.

Eleanor was realizing more and more that organized party politics as well as interest groups were indispensable methods for helping those less fortunate than herself. The liberal idealism of Eleanor Roosevelt was quickly emerging along with a knowledge of practical politics.

Following the 1922 election Eleanor continued strenuous work with the organizations she had joined. Politics had become a major concern for her. Probably the greatest part of her efforts was devoted to organizing women in New York counties. The work was hard, tedious and, at times, frustrating. But with the persistence and diligence of Eleanor and her co-workers, by 1924 all but five counties of New York had been organized. Needless to say, the men in the Democratic Party were impressed with the accomplishments.

Much of Eleanor's work to organize women was done in rural areas of the state where no men's organizations existed. She stressed to the women the importance of their voting power, of learning to work inside of politics rather than simply observing it from the outside.

When attending the Democratic state convention in New York that year, Eleanor took action to guide the Democratic women in rebelling against male domination of the party. She felt that in order for women to be effective, to achieve their desired goal, they must be treated equal to and "work with the men, not for them."³² It was at that convention that the New York Democratic delegates recognized, at least to a degree, the independence of their female party members and, because of that, agreed that women delegates and alternates should be selected by the women party members-- not by the men.

The positive results were not so visible for Eleanor when she took action for the party at the national level that same year. She was appointed chairman of a subcommittee for Democratic women having responsibility for formulating ideas for social welfare legislation which would be submitted to the Democratic Platform Committee. She assembled a committee which held hearings and drafted a number of rather progressive planks, all of which were rejected by the male-dominated Resolutions Committee.

Rejection of the recommended planks proved to be a "new step in [Eleanor's] education." She had learned bits and pieces of local and state politics and party organization, but at this convention she witnessed for the first time where

³²Lash, Eleanor and Roosevelt, p. 389.

women stood when it came to a national convention--"outside the door."³³

Eleanor had traveled a long way from her husband's election to the state legislature in 1910 to the Democratic National Convention of 1924. She had made her entrance into liberal politics. Her dependence had vanished, and her independent spirit had blossomed.

Her strong sense of duty and good heart, however, remained. These would lead to future involvement in many phases of society. Where she saw an injustice, she would strive for justice. Where she saw wrong, she would strive to make it right. She had learned the game of politics and never would she hesitate to make use of these lessons for promotion of her "conscientious causes."

³³Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 125.

CHAPTER III

ELEANOR AND THE NEW DEAL

Eleanor was a First Lady unlike all previous ones in the history of our country. She made significant changes in many of the long time traditions of the First Lady. She made the position more than that of hostess to the White House guests and became more than "a mouthpiece for [her] husband."¹ Eleanor seemed to use her position as a tool for accomplishing the goals of her own social reform concerns. She made use of the administration's New Deal programs for the same causes.

Though instructed to avoid political issues, Eleanor was not one to avoid other issues of controversy. She was quite direct and, at times, blunt. Many times she made public statements, particularly in her press conferences, which were known to have resulted in controversy. When questioned as to her reasoning for making such public comments, she once remarked, "What you don't understand is that perhaps I am making these statements on purpose to

¹Eleanor Roosevelt, The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 193.

arouse controversy and thereby get the topics talked about and so get people thinking about them."²

After the first hundred days in the White House the Roosevelts had served to uplift the hope and morale of the country. Drastic measures had been taken which instilled the public with hope for the depression's end. Eleanor had received national attention as wife of the President, but it was not long before she was recognized as Eleanor Roosevelt rather than "the President's wife." She was receiving letters by the thousands from people asking her assistance. With that she attained the position and fulfilled the role of intermediary between the average man and the government.

It has been claimed that Eleanor's most significant contribution to our government was "in keeping the President from becoming increasingly isolated in the White House."³

She traveled the country going to the people and returning to the White House with detailed realistic reports for President Roosevelt. Because of her simplicity and her ability to communicate in a way which revealed true interest, Eleanor was able to get the inside stories of particular problem areas. She acquired the confidence of those she went to and could get them to express their true feelings to her.

²Joseph Lash, Eleanor and Franklin (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1971), p. 483.

³Ruby Black, Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), p. 293.

With the variety of requests made upon Eleanor, she found it difficult to direct her attention upon one particular issue. She went where she felt she was needed. She felt that the depression, though an economic crisis in the beginning, had resulted in a moral crisis. "If we can get back the feeling that we are responsible to each other," she said, "these years of the depression will have been worthwhile."⁴ She hoped that the depression would teach the country the lesson of "interdependence," that "one part of the country or group of countrymen cannot prosper ... when the rest of the world is suffering."⁵ Thus, when requests flooded to her desk, when duty called, Eleanor responded quickly and efficiently.

One of her first excursions was in the slum area of Washington, D.C. Upon request from Mrs. Archibald Hopkins, Eleanor toured the area hoping to spark congressional action by bringing public attention to its problems. She confronted F.D.R. with her findings hoping that he would initiate action, but he refused and indicated that he would "help at the right time."⁶ Franklin made that sort of statement to Eleanor numerous times while he was serving as President, and it appears to have been the only gap in their teamwork as President and First Lady. Their general goals for the country

⁴Tamara K. Hareven, Eleanor Roosevelt: An American Conscience (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 50.

⁵Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 507.

⁶Ibid., p. 486.

were quite similar. It was in their methods of attaining the goals that disagreement existed. Franklin, holding a political office, found it essential to act from a political standpoint. Even when he supported a program, if he felt the time was not right to introduce it, he didn't.

Eleanor, on the other hand, was moralistic and idealistic. Where she found problems such as injustice and suffering, she sought immediate remedy. She could not see how programs implemented for the purpose of bettering a bad condition could harm the Roosevelt Administration politically. She could not see reason to wait until "the time was right." When problems were observed, Eleanor felt the time to find solutions was "now."

Despite these differences, Eleanor proved to be a stout defender of her husband's programs. She was extremely significant in bringing out the humanitarian aspects of the programs. While some criticized New Deal programs as being an addition to the already complex bureaucracy, Eleanor had ways of removing the complexity and the distance of the programs from the minds of ordinary people. She explained them in simple terms and took them to the people--through newspapers, magazines, radio, and most importantly, through her personal visits.

A major example of Eleanor's efforts to promote her own social concerns by making use of New Deal programs is seen in her venture into the area of subsistence housing. In general, subsistence housing programs were established

in an attempt to spread industries from the large cities into rural, agricultural areas, therefore providing employment for the dwellers in those areas. The initial and, by far, most controversial of communities established by this program, Authurdale, became Eleanor's pet project.

The idea was to plan communities having subsistence homesteads. The people living on them would farm small plots and work in a nearby factory. In this sense it was felt that a good balance could be established between industry and agriculture, and the families in the area could enjoy a secure, stable income.⁷ Eleanor was attracted to the idea for humanitarian reasons because, in providing these homesteads, she saw the light of a promising future for those who were without hope.

Her extreme devotion to the project of Authurdale came about as a result of her visit to the depressed areas near Morgantown, West Virginia, where large numbers of coal miners had been laid off after World War I, never returning to employment. The Quakers had gone in to help the people of the depressed areas. But finding that they could not do enough, they invited Eleanor to investigate the conditions that they had tried to remedy.⁸

As Eleanor toured the area she observed families living in tents, unemployed men, people with no medical care

⁷Millard Milburn Rice, "Footnote on Authurdale," Harper's, March 1940, p. 412.

⁸Ibid., p. 413.

and insufficient diets.⁹ Upon returning to Washington, D.C., she immediately set out to secure a homestead project for that particular area of West Virginia. This was the starting point of what was soon to be Authurdale--"the most expensive, most publicized, and most controversial of the homesteads."¹⁰

Eleanor's desire was to make Authurdale a complete success and use it as a model for future homesteads. She wanted to establish an advanced education system. She wanted to establish a model public health clinic. She wanted an active "producing-consumer" community.¹¹ Most importantly, she liked the Quaker idea of helping the people to help themselves. She hoped the government would promote these objectives at Authurdale.

A 1200-acre farm was purchased by the government as the site for Authurdale. In addition, the government was to buy the houses, attain livestock, provide roads, water and farm machinery. The homesteaders were to pay for their low-cost homes over a number of years. A factory would be established to provide jobs for the unemployed.¹²

Eleanor was familiar with each and every detail of Authurdale. Her efforts did result in establishing public health services for the settlers; and the school that was set

⁹Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 175.

¹⁰Hareven, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 95.

¹¹Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 526.

¹²Black, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 247.

up came to be an important factor in keeping their attitudes positive. Unfortunately, what began as an enthusiastic, hopeful project turned into an expensive and very controversial one. The Authurdale project was begun too hastily. Eleanor wanted immediate action and she got it. Ready built houses were ordered which did not fit the foundations that had been dug for them. The houses, normally used for beach cottages, provided no protection against the cold winter temperatures of the mountain snow, so they had to be redesigned in a way that would meet the needs of the settlers. The redesigned houses resulted in costs two to three times higher than if they had been built from original foundations.¹³ This resulted in the homesteaders moving in several months late.

Besides that, Eleanor felt that if Authurdale were to be a model project the homes should be well equipped--cellars, fireplaces, indoor baths and plumbing, as well as major furnishings. As a result the settlers were living in homes whose standards were higher than they could afford to pay. Eleanor at this point was overlooking the practical difficulties. She could only see the broad possibilities for human betterment, and she used her position to bring these to fruition as soon as possible.

In addition to problems with the physical facilities at Authurdale, complications arose with the factory which was to have been established to provide jobs. The Public Works Administration had allocated funds to the Post Office Depart-

¹³Rice, "Footnote on Authurdale," p. 413.

ment for a factory in Authurdale which would produce post office equipment. But congressional opposition mounted, quickly accusing the administration of attempting to further the already existing socialistic programs and trying to "wipe out" private industry.¹⁴ This harsh attack by Congress caused Eleanor to resort to inviting private industry to locate in Authurdale rather than risking further congressional attack on the entire experiment. She asked the General Electric Company to establish a plant for vacuum cleaners, but due to a lack of orders the plant had to shut down within one year.¹⁵ Eleanor made numerous attempts to get industry established in Authurdale, but she was unsuccessful.

The failure to obtain a factory for Authurdale resulted in a major setback for the entire project. Without employment the homesteaders obviously could not make payments on their homes, nor could they help themselves reach a decent standard of living. The problems that arose were due in part to the fact that government funds were spent and managed unwisely and hastily. Planning was non-existent.

In spite of continuous criticism by the press, public, and Congress, Eleanor remained blindly determined to continue what she had begun. A school was established for Authurdale which appears to have been the only part of the entire homestead that could be labeled successful. Eleanor wanted the

¹⁴Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 527.

¹⁵Hareven, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 103.

school to serve as the major center around which the settlers would learn a new way of life, a center that would demonstrate "what [could] be done and should be done in rural communities."¹⁶

Realizing the expense of a "model school" such as she had in mind, Eleanor resorted to use of private contributions to finance the school. She financed what she could through earnings from articles and radio broadcasts, but much funding was provided by a wealthy supporter of the homestead, Mr. Bernard Baruch.

Under direction of the teacher, Elsie Clapp, the Authurdale school became what Eleanor had in mind. It was "the center of almost every community activity,"¹⁷ many of which Eleanor attended. She was a frequent visitor of the homestead and was extremely aware of the progress, the problems, the details of Authurdale. She was able to chat with the homesteaders on an equal basis, and they with her. She enjoyed her visits to Authurdale and was interested in the most minor and seemingly unimportant events. She wanted the true picture of what was happening and believed she could best learn this directly from the people. They seem to have opened up their feelings to her easily, even with the little things. She wanted terribly for the settlers to believe that their government cared about them and she appointed herself as the one to see to it that they attained that belief.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁷Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 538.

The end of Eleanor's constant involvement with Authurdale may have resulted from the dependence the settlers came to have upon her. They came to depend on her too much. They called upon her to resolve the most minor of problems. They came to be too dependent on the government, as Eleanor later pointed out, and they felt that turning to the Federal Government was the solution for all of their problems.¹⁸ It is possible that Eleanor worked too closely with these people. She, in a sense, spoiled them. They were doing nothing to help themselves. They were stingy with the materials they received and tended to live selfishly rather than as a closely knit community dependent on one another. True, the homestead of Authurdale eventually died out, but Eleanor's undivided interest in the homestead died out long before the homestead did. She helped and provided all she was willing to provide. She could not do it all on her own, nor could the government. She lost all confidence in the settlers at Authurdale because they were not even willing to help her as she helped them. They were not willing to carry out the responsibilities that were expected of them.

Eleanor fought hard and persistently to attain as much for Authurdale as she did. No doubt she would have continued had the spirit of the people been one of wanting to help themselves. But it was not. And so, as her faith in the homesteaders declined, her interest and support for other humanitarian causes grew.

¹⁸Rice, "Footnote on Authurdale," p. 419.

Another of Eleanor's endeavors with humanitarian causes was with those she labeled "the stranded generation"--the young people.¹⁹ In an attempt to assist the "stranded generation," Eleanor became involved in what proved to be a very controversial issue. The youth, Eleanor felt, had been forgotten by the elders of the country. They were jobless, and Eleanor's deep interest led to her eventual association with youth organizations. She had high hopes for the youth because, unlike Authurdale, they were making efforts to help themselves. She was impressed with their "real desire to contribute to the solution of their own problems."²⁰

Sensing the earnestness of the youth groups, Eleanor urged the country to listen to them and urged the youth to fight for the things they believed in. She wanted, as she had in Authurdale, to restore their "faith in the power of democracy to meet their needs."²¹ As with the poor, Eleanor felt that the country had not provided the young people with ways to earn their livings. It was not the fault of the young people that they were without employment, but the fault of the older generation for not taking action to assure employment for them. She felt the government should take responsibility for fulfilling the neglected task.

Eleanor envisioned a program whereby the youth could be employed in communities at public service jobs with

¹⁹Black, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 210.

²⁰Ibid., p. 224.

²¹Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 208.

governmental agencies, hospitals, schools, libraries and so forth.²² Following initial meetings with various groups of young people, Eleanor requested F.D.R.'s attention and action claiming that the youth were in desperate need of jobs. F.D.R. eventually responded with an executive order bringing into existence the National Youth Administration, an agency to "provide aid to high school, college and graduate students in continuing their education and to provide work projects and training for out-of-school, jobless young people."²³

Again, we observe the "helping others" characteristic in Eleanor. She wanted to help young people to help themselves;²⁴ and, therefore, she served not only to initiate the National Youth Administration, but she followed through to assure that National Youth Administration (NYA) participants were being trained to make a living and not being taught simple, useless tasks. Thus, it can be seen that while Eleanor was drawn to idealistic, sometimes unattainable goals, once programs were designed to pursue these goals, she focused her concern on practical results.

Not for one minute did Eleanor believe the NYA to be the full answer to problems of the youth. She once stated, "I believe in the National Youth Administration never as a

²²Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 699.

²³Black, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 215.

²⁴"Dies vs. Mrs. Roosevelt," Current History 51 (January 1940): 8.

fundamental answer, but simply as something which gives hope, which gives perhaps a suggestion which might be followed by communities."²⁵ She wished to inspire hope in the youth, to regain their trust and faith in the government. Once again she appointed herself as the person to restore those things.

As her involvement with youth programs became more extensive, Eleanor received criticism in its worst forms as well as praise in its best forms. She was never intimidated by any of the negative remarks. She never spoke to a group without answering their questions. She invited the troubled youth to talk with her at the White House, and she served as a key advisor to them. Eleanor was inspired by the fact that young people were making efforts to help themselves. Because of this, she felt they deserved all the "consideration and assistance their elders could possibly give them."²⁶ So, if the youth turned Communist out of despair it was to be blamed on society. This was probably why Eleanor was able to tolerate and forgive the irrational actions of the youth so often.

The American Youth Congress was probably the most criticized of the organizations Eleanor patronized. She was constantly being warned against its Communist-inspired members but continued to believe the youth when they assured her that they had no connection with Communists. She worked constantly on youth problems. She spoke at Youth Congress

²⁵"Security for Youth and Age," Time, March 7, 1939, p. 11.

²⁶Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 208.

meetings and became very friendly with its leaders.²⁷ It seems as though she stressed most the need for employment opportunities for the youth, opportunities to make them "useful" at an early age in life. It did not take Eleanor long to discover that Communist elements were beginning to move into the Youth Congress. But perhaps because of her blind dedication to the youth it was quite some time before she realized that the Communist force was a controlling one. When she was absolutely sure of this fact, she never worked with the Youth Congress again because she could no longer trust them to be honest with her.²⁸

The impact Eleanor Roosevelt had on solving problems of the youth cannot be labeled as fundamental, but her involvement, though controversial, probably caused the public to open its eyes and take action toward bettering the conditions for young people. In later discussing her involvement with the Youth Congress, Eleanor stated no regrets for having been involved with the group. She felt sorry for them and the conditions under which they had to grow up. Most importantly though, Eleanor did not picture her involvement as wasted time. She felt as though she had benefitted in her work with the young people. She learned from them how Communists infiltrate an organization through the tactics of objection and delay, how they would tire out

²⁷"Dies vs. Mrs. Roosevelt," p. 8.

²⁸Roosevelt, Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 210.

their opponents through these tactics and then carry the vote when the opponents had gone home. She later claimed, "I think my work with the American Youth Congress was one of infinite value to me in understanding some of the tactics I had to meet later in the United Nations."²⁹ That in itself served as a contribution to Eleanor's influence and importance in her later years as a United Nations delegate.

There remains one other essential area in which Eleanor Roosevelt persistently expressed the various aspects of her social thought--that of restoring faith in democracy and struggling for social justice and equality. Again, this remaining issue was one of controversy and one in which she was outspoken in spite of the political risks to her husband's administration. That was the issue of Negro rights.

In the mind of Eleanor Roosevelt, discrimination was a moral issue. She disliked the hypocrisy in the way that the country stood for democratic ideals while treating Negroes as inferior to whites. She felt such discrimination, if continued, would destroy the ideals of the democracy upon which the country was based.³⁰ As preventative measures, she believed two steps had to be taken. First, the political-legal barrier to equality had to be broken. It was the responsibility of the government to see that all legal barriers to equality for the Negro were removed, that they were insured equal

²⁹Ibid., p. 210.

³⁰Eleanor Roosevelt, "Race, Religion, and Prejudice," New Republic 106 (May 11, 1942): 630.

treatment, first in the courts and employment, then in education, housing and public services as well. After the political-legal barrier was broken, the next step would be to break the social barriers to equality--to make society aware of the immorality, the inhumanity in discrimination and of the steps needed to prevent it.³¹

It has been argued that the New Deal did nothing directly to better the condition of the Negro. No new legislation mandating equal treatment of the Negro was created by the New Deal. However, this lack of action was not because Eleanor Roosevelt did not attempt to secure such legislation. During F.D.R.'s first presidential term Eleanor stood as a firm supporter of the very controversial Costigan-Wagner Bill which proposed stiff penalties for lynching. For supporters of this bill, particularly the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), Eleanor served as the path to the President.

Civil rights proved to be one of the areas in which Eleanor and Franklin agreed on the end results but not on the means of attaining that end. Once again, Eleanor looked at the matter from the standpoint of the injustice and inequality being thrust upon the Negro. Franklin, on the other hand, was one to think of the political effects which could evolve from his support of such legislation as the Costigan-Wagner Bill. By openly advocating and pushing for passage of this bill, he could lose the support of the southern block in

³¹Hareven, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 213.

Congress, thus preventing passage of his top priority-- recovery legislation. Recovery from the depression, in the mind of Franklin Roosevelt, would benefit everyone, Negro and whites alike. It was essential that his recovery program succeed in Congress first; then he would be free to concentrate on lower priority programs such as Civil Rights.³²

Since Eleanor could not be a great force in securing sweeping civil rights legislation, she channeled her actions into securing equality and justice in the programs which were established by Franklin's New Deal. She saw to it that Negroes were equally included in New Deal programs and had an equal opportunity to benefit from such programs. So, though Eleanor could not persuade the administration to better the Negro's conditions through legislation, she had substantial influence in the way policy was implemented and thus was able to better conditions of that particular portion of society.

Perhaps most of all, Eleanor gave Negroes something to hope for. They finally had someone working for them who could be effective. She gained their confidence and dependence. Still, Eleanor wanted the Negroes to be in a position to help themselves. She stressed self improvement to them. She encouraged them not to lose hope, not to lose patience, and to strive for improvement of conditions together. Most of all she encouraged the Negro to strive for improvement of his educational facilities: to fight first for, and attain,

³²Ibid., p. 121.

a good education and then to use that education for attacking social prejudice.³³

At this point one is able to recognize the common sense, practical approach Eleanor was stressing to the Negro. The only possible hope for Negroes to help themselves was to begin by attaining an adequate education, which would eventually destroy illiteracy among their people and enable them to intelligently strive for their social rights. Eleanor realized, though, that even when the Negro did become educated (as many were becoming at that time) the badge of social inferiority would still exist along with unequal treatment for blacks in most areas of American life. But with "tact and patience and an effort at real understanding" from both sides, such a problem could be overcome.³⁴ It was with that realistic but hopeful sort of attitude that Eleanor wrote articles and made numerous speeches on behalf of Negro rights.

Probably the most important contribution she made to the Negro cause was the example she set as a citizen of the United States. She made a point of practicing, as well as preaching about, equality of treatment for Negro citizens. She was constantly surprising and shocking the public as well as the politicians by inviting Negro groups and organizations to be guests in the White House.

³³Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 670.

³⁴Roosevelt, "Race, Religion and Prejudice," p. 630.

In February, 1936, she invited a Negro singer, Marion Anderson, to perform at the White House. Three years later, Howard University approached the Daughters of American Revolution (DAR) to arrange for the use of Constitution Hall for a performance by Ms. Anderson. When the DAR refused and its president made the comment that no Negro would ever be allowed to perform there, Eleanor resigned as a member of that organization.³⁵

Another incident occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, at the Southern Conference on Human Welfare. In enforcing a local ordinance, officials of Birmingham forced Negro delegates and white delegates to be seated in separate sections of the room. When Eleanor entered the meeting and sat on the Negro side, police warned her that she was breaking the law. She picked up her chair and moved it into the aisle between the Negro and white side. In this way, Eleanor publicized her views on the race question in her daily actions. Roy Wilkins, who served as Executive Director of the N.A.A.C.P., summarized the difference between Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt in this manner: Franklin was a friend of the Negro "only insofar as he refused to exclude the Negro from his general policies that applied to the whole country"; Mrs. Roosevelt, however, was considered the true friend of the Negro because the "personal touches and the personal fight against discrimination" were hers.³⁶

³⁵Lash, Eleanor and Franklin, p. 670.

³⁶Hareven, Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 124.

Throughout the New Deal Eleanor attempted to put into action her belief in the superiority of democracy. She remembered those who in the past had been forgotten. She restored faith in many of those who had lost hope. She was not so concerned about the establishment of broad sweeping programs as she was about assuring that such programs reached the worst victims of the depression who were part of the underprivileged, neglected sector of society.

So, Eleanor is not remembered for the New Deal programs she helped to enact, for her influences in that realm was negligible. But it can be said that Eleanor imparted to the New Deal a stronger humanitarian image and spirit than it otherwise might have had. Her very visible presence probably enhanced the attractiveness of the New Deal coalition in the eyes of reformers and idealists who saw in it a chance for political action.

Throughout the New Deal era, Eleanor Roosevelt's liberalism was expressed in her sense of duty to help the less privileged and her desire to restore their faith in democracy. Even the disappointment she felt, as she discovered that some of the very people she was trying to help were not willing to try and help themselves, did not result in her withdrawal in liberal humanitarian politics; rather it resulted in the development of a stronger, and perhaps more realistic, Eleanor Roosevelt.

CHAPTER IV

ELEANOR AND INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

With the death of President Roosevelt in 1945, one might assume, and many did at that time, that the story would also be ending for Eleanor, that she would take on a quieter, more private lifestyle.

Although unsure, and seemingly in no real hurry to decide about precise plans for her future, Eleanor clearly defined what she did not want: "I did not want to run an elaborate household again. I did not want to cease trying to be useful in some way. I did not want to feel old."¹

Whatever the outcome of her future, the first few months after President Roosevelt's death would call for quite an adjustment. She was back in general circulation before long, however, speaking at colleges and for various organizations, writing her daily newspaper column, "My Day," as well as offering advice to the Democratic National Chairman about the country's political situation.²

Eleanor was approached on numerous occasions with the recommendation that she run for political office. She quickly

¹Eleanor Roosevelt, On My Own (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1958), p. 2.

²Alfred Steinberg, Mrs. R.: The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), p. 318.

put aside such propositions with the claim that she wanted to be able to speak freely without obligation; besides that, she held a strong feeling that her best contributions could not be made by running for office.³

Eleanor deplored idleness. It was characteristic of her to be in a constant state of activity (a characteristic which probably contributed most to her unusually fast adjustment to widowhood). It was also a characteristic which drew Eleanor into so many undertakings with no real focus on any one of them. She was quite committed, however, to the objective toward which her husband had so diligently worked during the last years of his life--that of building an international organization which might prevent future wars.⁴ Her concern for a successful international organization was revealed in her writings, her speeches, and especially in her letters and conversations with President Truman.

Sensing the political importance of getting the United Nations Organization off to a positive start, and realizing the impact that the presence of a Roosevelt could present in the initial sessions, President Truman invited Eleanor to go to London in January, 1946, as an American delegate to the U.N. General Assembly. Eleanor agreed to attend the London session, but not because she felt that she would contribute significantly to any business that may have been discussed.

³Ibid., p. 317.

⁴Eleanor Roosevelt, "One of Many," Reader's Digest 46 (June 1945): 26.

She was by no means confident in her ability to make any substantive impacts. Rather, she accepted the appointment for a symbolic reason. The United Nations was Franklin's "legacy to the world."⁵ Perhaps her presence at the conference could assure that the U.S. delegation behaved in a spirit conducive to the dreams and ideals of F.D.R.

For Eleanor, the death of her husband and the end of World War II were the focal points of a new beginning. Franklin's death marked a more outspoken and more confident Eleanor Roosevelt. The conclusion of World War II marked the beginning of a new world organization upon which Eleanor would concentrate her efforts.

Opposition to Eleanor's appointment as a delegate was strong amongst a few, but, for the most part, her appointment was highly popular both in the United States and abroad. Eleanor's supporters considered her a friend, a spokesman, and a "symbol of the most generous aspects of our nation."⁶

Naturally Eleanor had a feeling of uncertainty since she was a beginner who had to be working alongside professionals whose experience had well equipped them for discussing international affairs. For example, the American delegates with whom she was to be serving consisted of two senators who had served on the Senate Foreign Relations

⁵Steinberg, Mrs. R.: The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 320.

⁶"American Representatives to the UNO General Assembly," Nation, December 29, 1945, p. 722.

Committee, the Secretary of State for the Truman Administration, and the Secretary of State under the Roosevelt Administration.⁷

While on board ship en route to London, Eleanor diligently read and studied in detail the briefing materials provided her by the State Department. She made inquiries. She attended every briefing session conducted by the State Department, and even sat in when reporters interviewed officials from the State Department.⁸ Although Eleanor accepted the position without extensive background in international affairs, she was determined to put forth her best efforts, and by the time the American delegation arrived at their destination, Eleanor had grasped the information provided her. Those delegates who were so skeptical of her appointment before leaving the States were becoming more favorable to the appointment. However, they remained unconvinced of her ability to deal with representatives of other nations on a one-to-one basis. She was assigned to represent the United States on Committee III--formed to deal with humanitarian, educational and cultural matters--supposedly a committee of limited prestige and one on which she could do little harm.⁹ During the London session, though, Committee III was confronted with the heated subject of what to do with

⁷Joseph Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1972), p. 29.

⁸Ibid., p. 31.

⁹Roosevelt, On My Own, p. 44.

European refugees. Over one million displaced war refugees were living in temporary camps because they feared returning to live in their own Communist-ruled countries. Communists argued that any person who chose not to return to his country should be labeled a traitor and be returned to his country to accept the deserved punishment.

Western countries argued, on the other hand, that refugees should be provided a guarantee of the right to choose where they live. Eleanor spent hours upon hours with Committee III in an attempt to reach a solution agreeable to all. Her efforts were useless. Russian delay tactics, she soon discovered, were even more predominant than she had experienced in previous years when dealing with the Youth Congress. Throughout her struggle to reach agreement on the refugee question, Eleanor's qualities of being rational and patient, but persistent and unwilling to surrender to Russian tactics, were evident. This approach gained for her respect from all delegates including the Russians.

Nevertheless, the question of refugees could not be unanimously agreed upon in Committee III. A report of the Committee's majority opinion, then, was presented to the full assembly, only to be challenged and degraded by the skillful debator and head of Russian delegation, Adrei Vishinsky.

In addition to demanding that refugees be returned to their countries of origin regardless of their desire, Vishinsky called for passage of a resolution forbidding "prop-

aganda against returning to their native countries," in other words, forbidding freedom of speech in the refugee camps.¹⁰

Because no member of the United States delegation, with the exception of their representative on Committee III, was knowledgeable, much less prepared, to speak on the refugee topic, it was only natural that Eleanor Roosevelt was requested to respond to Vishinsky's remarks. Speaking extemporaneously and with the simplicity and goodness so characteristic of her style, Eleanor, in her objection to Vishinsky's proposal, spoke on behalf of the right of a human being to hear the good or bad of any nation and make his own decision. "It is their right to say it and their right to hear it and make their own decision." She went on to describe the task of the United Nations not as one of deciding what nations are right or wrong, but rather "to frame things which will be broader in outlook, which will consider first the rights of man, which will consider what makes man more free, not governments, but man."¹¹

The refugee controversy was by no means the most important topic of discussion during the London session, but it may well have been the most publicized. The general sessions dealt, to a large extent, with technical issues of no real interest to the press. When the political issue of refugees aroused the controversy that it did, the press

¹⁰Eleanor Roosevelt, "Human Rights and Human Freedom," New York Times Magazine, March 24, 1946, p. 21.

¹¹Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 45.

jumped at the opportunity to publicize it. In this way, the irony of Eleanor Roosevelt's appointment to the supposedly noncontroversial, inconspicuous Committee III evolved.

Through her words, Eleanor Roosevelt became a moving force in the assembly, gaining respect not because of her good and simple mannerisms, and not because she was a Roosevelt, but because of her wisdom and because of her ability to understand a philosophical issue and present it to others in a down-to-earth, common sense manner.

The essential value of Eleanor's trip to London lay not in the fact that she debated on an extremely controversial issue, but that she was able to transfer much of her spirit of optimism, hope, and determination to many of the delegates at this first United Nations assembly. Through her experiences during this initial session, Eleanor became certain that "the United Nations was the best hope we had for peace, and she was ready to devote her life to it."¹²

To no one's surprise Eleanor was asked to continue serving in the capacity of a U.N. delegate and did so until January 1953. The area in which her attentions were most concentrated remained that of human rights; and the single activity to which most of her energies were devoted was the writing and helping to secure passage of the document known as the Declaration of Human Rights. In the spring of 1946 she served as chairman for a "nuclear" commission whose

¹²Joseph Lash, Eleanor Roosevelt: A Friend's Memoir (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 301.

purpose was to outline a program for drafting an International Bill of Rights. The following January, when the Commission on Human Rights was established, she was elected chairman for the body.¹³

Ahead of Eleanor lay the enormous task of persuading delegates of varied ideologies to agree on, and accept, a single document. First and foremost was the problem of getting the Declaration into a terminology agreeable to all members of the Human Rights Commission and getting it approved by the General Assembly. Next came the task of getting all member nations to sign a covenant or treaty, giving the Declaration the force of law.

Eleanor carried out her role as a U.S. delegate with an intense degree of hope and enthusiasm. She was, nevertheless, prepared for setbacks and did not deceive herself by claiming the road would be short and easy. She was an optimist tempered by a degree of realism. She was willing to move slowly so long as progress was being made toward reaching her destined goal--"a world in which all men get a chance for full development of themselves as individuals and for a better surrounding in which to live."¹⁴ Eleanor believed that as much as humanly possible should be done toward this final goal, and if it was impossible to accomplish everything at once, at least what was accomplished was better than

¹³Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 52.

¹⁴Eleanor Roosevelt, "Human Rights and Human Freedom," New York Times Magazine, March 24, 1946, p. 21.

nothing at all. Ground could not be gained, she felt, by standing still.¹⁵

Eleanor's optimism was put to the test on numerous occasions and through all the struggles, debates, progress and stoppages she somehow managed not to lose it.

Aside from her optimism, other elements of Eleanor's character served to contribute to her achievements as a U.N. delegate. These were her unending concern for the human element of any issue and the steadfast determination with which she set out to accomplish her objectives.

The task Eleanor labeled her "most important" during her years at the U.N. was her work on the Human Rights Commission. It is not hard to imagine what a difficult task it must have been to accomplish anything in a context of such varied cultures and ideologies. But Eleanor's optimism was undaunted. She marvelled at the miracle of "nations coming together and try[ing] to work out in cooperation such principles as will make life more worthwhile for the average human being."¹⁶

Throughout the numerous drafting sessions for the Declaration, Eleanor carried on with firmness, directness and frankness. She did not take easily to procedural formalities but realized their necessity and became an expert at them.¹⁷

¹⁵William A. DeWitt and Eleanor Roosevelt, U.N.: Today and Tomorrow (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1952), p. xii.

¹⁶Eleanor Roosevelt, "Message from Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt," United Nations Bulletin 2 (February 1947): 171.

¹⁷Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p.47.

Eleanor believed the key to successful negotiations was in being honest and blunt and in taking a stand for what is right and sticking with it. She frequently spoke of her fear that American delegates were afraid to accept a moral leadership role. In a letter to Joe Lash she spoke of her discouragement with the American delegates' ability to lead, claiming "We could lead but we don't. We shift to conciliate and trail either Great Britian or Russia and at times I am sure a feeling [that] we had convictions and would fight for them would be reassuring to [the other delegates]."¹⁸

Though Eleanor was an American delegate she had the knack of approaching all matters from a standpoint of how it would aid world peace rather than how it would help the U.S. in gaining power. British delegates would often suggest to her the necessity of Great Britian and the United States sticking together in order to keep Russians in their places. Speaking of both Great Britian and Russia Eleanor believed "we must be fair and stand for what we believe is right and let them, either or both, side with us. We have had that leadership and we must recapture it."¹⁹

There were even occasions when Eleanor found her moral humanitarian beliefs in conflict with U.S. State Department policy or political strategy. She spoke out against the "Truman Doctrine" which was intended to assist Greece and Turkey against the aggressive movements of totalitarian

¹⁸Lash, Eleanor Roosevelt: A Friend's Memoir, p. 300.

¹⁹Ibid.

governments.²⁰ She claimed that its effect had been to weaken the United Nations. In the spring of 1947 she called upon the State Department to provide relief for starving Yugoslavians in spite of the ideological differences and the rude and arrogant actions of the Yugoslavians she had witnessed during the United Nations sessions. Eleanor saw human suffering as the main enemy and she felt that no policy, no ideological difference, was as important as alleviating it.

Though her activities were carried out with firmness and persistence, Eleanor Roosevelt never forgot the humanitarian values that were so much a part of her character. She worked to foster these values with common sense and practicality and was credited with being able to achieve far better results than the "cunning politician."²¹

Eleanor never lost her desire to get the true picture of a situation by observing it first hand. Before sailing home from her first U.N. session in London, she arranged a trip to Germany in order that she could see for herself exactly what had happened to the European refugees. "Nothing," she later claimed, "could better illustrate the sickening waste and destructiveness and futility of war" than what she saw.²² Her visits consisted of more than simple spot checks.

²⁰Ibid., p. 329.

²¹W.L. White, "Great Lady," Saturday Review Literature 29 (March 23, 1946): 25.

²²Eleanor Roosevelt, The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1961), p. 309.

She went into living quarters and walked along the streets. She talked extensively with the people and listened to what they had to say. That was Eleanor Roosevelt's way of finding out the true picture just as it had been at Authurdale during the New Deal years. She still strongly believed in that method.

Upon greeting fellow U.N. delegates as they returned from a visit to Displaced Persons camps in Europe, Eleanor asked them what they had seen. Claiming that they had "talked to a lot of army officers and gone on uncondacted tours of the camps, but had not talked to the displaced persons, she responded in a strained voice, "How can you know anything unless you talk to the people themselves?"²³

Even in her day-to-day interactions Eleanor was never too busy to be kind, because, to her, small considerations had a larger significance. She believed that the large problems with which governments must deal are made up of a number of smaller ones. "I can never forget that this country or any other country is, in the final analysis, a collection of human beings striving to be happy, and it is the human element which is the most important consideration."²⁴

Throughout her United Nations years, Eleanor's personality and basic concepts remained consistent, except when it

²³Ralph G. Martin, "Number One World Citizen," New Republic 115 (August 1946): 140.

²⁴S. J. Woolf, "The New Chapter in Mrs. Roosevelt's Life," New York Times Magazine, December 15, 1946, p. 52.

came to the Russians; and on that subject her viewpoint took a turnaround.

In her initial stages as a U.N. delegate, Eleanor truly felt that headway could be made with the Russian delegates. "Given a respectable amount of steady bargaining, given a determination to state the facts plainly, repeatedly and non-economically, given the daily patient emphasis of the United States' desire to live in a world of peace,"²⁵ she was prepared to "bend over backward to show Russians she would meet them halfway."²⁶

Realizing that agreement between the Soviet and Western delegates would take years, Eleanor felt that results would eventually come through working together on a friendly basis and persistently working for what was right.²⁷ Eleanor, probably more than any other U.N. delegate, carried on with this optimistic, hopeful attitude toward the Russians. Her tolerance and patience was stretched probably more than it had ever been. She once recalled thinking that her patience had been put through its most trying test when she was raising her children, but that proved to be minor compared to her struggles with the Russians.²⁸

²⁵A. M. Rosenthal, "On Dealing With the Russians," New York Times Magazine, January 18, 1953, p. 10.

²⁶Lash, Eleanor Roosevelt: The Years Alone, p. 98.

²⁷Roosevelt, On My Own, p. 66.

²⁸Martin, "Number One World Citizen," p. 22.

In Human Rights Commission work, whenever a Russian proposal was voted down, Soviet delegates retaliated by delay tactics. One such technique was that of keeping a meeting in session until others got tired and left prior to action being taken. They would attempt to wear down their opposition by never giving up a point and by repetition of the same point over and over again. On one such occasion, Eleanor cornered the non-Russian members of her committee requesting that they remain in the meeting and outlast the Soviets. The Russians talked on and on, often receiving a patient smile and nod from Eleanor directing them to continue. Finally, at daybreak their voices failed them, thus putting a halt to their ability to protest and allowing a vote to be taken. Needless to say, the vote went her way.

The Russians were also known for seeking out American weaknesses and distorting facts to the point of irritation. Such was a common technique of Soviet delegate Alexei Pavlov who distorted the truth by asserting the U.S.S.R. ability to have increased its medical facilities and its supply of doctors and nurses by 50 percent. When the claim was later put under examination by Eleanor, Pavlov slyed away from details by saying that he did not understand. This habit Eleanor had of cornering someone for questioning worked to disconcert the Soviet delegate.²⁹

In spite of numerous attempts made by Eleanor Roosevelt to gain their trust and friendship, the Russian delegates were

²⁹Rosenthal, "On Dealing With the Russians," p. 10.

determined to show no weakness in the presence of westerners and displayed a stubborn unfriendliness toward western ideas.

Word did reach the United States that Eleanor was moving along quite well in her dealings with the Russians. President Truman wrote her: "I have marveled at the poise and patience that you have maintained in the face of maddening techniques of the Russians. Not only have they been deliberately non-cooperative but they have conducted themselves with boorishness worthy of stable boys. I have observed with great satisfaction that you have put them in their place more than once."³⁰

Although Eleanor proved effective in countering the negative tactics of the Soviet delegates, she found it virtually impossible to move forward and reach understandings with them. Her willingness to compromise and meet them halfway as a "gesture of good will" was taken as a weakness by the Russians.³¹ She made numerous attempts to engage Russian delegates in private, frank conversations, just to get to know them on a friendly basis. She had a custom of inviting U.N. delegates to her home for tea or dinner in attempts to discuss something informally and just get to know the delegates better. This custom was of no avail when it came to the Russians. She found it impossible to engage in a private, frank talk with any of them.³²

³⁰Steinberg, Mrs. R.: The Life of Eleanor Roosevelt, p. 333.

³¹Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 98.

³²Roosevelt, On My Own, p. 62

So, in spite of Eleanor's persistent attempts to make headway with the Russians, they remained the greatest barrier to her efforts to promote worldwide understanding and cooperation. When she finally concluded that there was no hope for getting them to cooperate, she simply considered their presence a stumbling block that she would be required to work around. As in her earlier years, Eleanor as a U.N. delegate was one to give her all in trying to achieve humanitarian objectives. But when the other party refused to carry on in the same spirit, refused to carry their share of the load, or, as in the case of the Soviet delegates, refused to even respond to her efforts, she would cease her struggles. It had happened with Authurdale; it had happened with the Youth Congress; and it eventually happened with the Russians.

In her United Nations struggles, as in earlier moral challenges, Eleanor was able to draw a certain personal victory from the jaws of political defeat. She did this by being an inspiring personal example of those humanitarian values for which she fought. This paradoxical victory could not have been achieved if she had pursued it in a calculating, self-serving way. By being uncommonly genuine and consistent in her humanitarianism, she remained a strong inspirational force among American liberals.

CHAPTER V

ELEANOR AND DEMOCRATIC PARTY POLITICS

Eleanor's participation in politics and political campaigning had been interrupted after the death of her husband in 1945 and her subsequent appointment by President Truman as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. Even in this nonpartisan role, she continued to inspire and enhance the Democratic Party. On numerous occasions Democratic Party leaders urged Eleanor to run for political office. This was especially true in 1946 when New York democratic party leaders urged her candidacy for United States Senate.¹ Eleanor was a popular individual, not only because she was symbolic of F.D.R., but also in her own right. She was very firm, however, in telling party leaders that she would never consider running for office.

Eleanor felt that since no woman had yet been able to gain high elective office and provide strong leadership there, running would serve no practical purpose. Eleanor's desire to speak freely and express opinions on various subjects, and her belief that being a political office holder would prevent such free speech, also prevented her from considering

¹Lorena Hickock and Eleanor Roosevelt, Ladies of Courage (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1954), p. 285.

becoming a candidate. There was also the fact that she was more than sixty years old. Eleanor felt an obligation to step aside and help young people move into "management of the world."²

Most importantly, for the first time in her life, Eleanor was devoting all her energies to one activity--that of serving as a delegate to the United States General Assembly. Serving in that capacity, Eleanor felt, meant putting aside partisan political activity. For several years, she did just that.³

Eleanor did, however, continue to stay abreast of and provide opinions about internal Democratic Party developments. In 1946, for example, when the Republican Party gained control of both Houses of Congress and was moving in a very conservative direction, Eleanor was quite outspoken within state party meetings urging that the party must remain liberal and must maintain the support of women, labor, and liberals in order to win elections. She could see that the Democratic Party leaders were trying to appeal to the conservative voters, thinking that the appeal would win back Democratic Party defectors who had helped put so many Republicans in office in 1946. But, in her thinking, the Democratic Party was making a big mistake.

²Joseph Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1972), p. 132.

³Ibid.

By the 1948 Presidential campaign, when President Truman was seeking re-election, the conservative movement within the Democratic Party and the Truman Administration was clearly evident. Truman's own "middle-class conservatism" had resulted in his surrounding himself with a group of conservative advisors (Marrier S. Eccles, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board; John W. Snyder, Secretary of Treasury; Clinton P. Anderson, Secretary of Agriculture), and losing a number of F.D.R. liberals (Harold Ickes, Secretary of Interior; Chester Bowles, Head of O.P.A.; Wilson Wyatt, Housing Expediator; and Henry Wallace, Commerce Secretary). Eleanor also felt that he and the Democratic Party were not directing their attentions to worries and fears of the average man--namely inflation, the rise of Communist power in the world and another war.⁴

Henry Wallace, former Vice President under F.D.R. and former Commerce Secretary in both the F.D.R. and Truman Administrations, had announced he would run for President as the candidate of the newly formed Liberal Progressive Party. While Eleanor had once supported Wallace as the Vice Presidential running mate for her husband, and appreciated his integrity, she had, by 1948, lost total confidence in his political judgement. By allowing the policy making members of the Progressive Citizens of America to contain Communist elements; by making overseas denunciations of the American foreign policy at a time when "togetherness" was so important

⁴Ibid., p. 138.

to the strength of the United Nations; by accommodating Russian expansionism; and by claiming that a vote for him was a vote against war with Russia, Wallace destroyed Eleanor's confidence in his political judgement.⁵

She did point out that, unlike democrats and republicans, Henry Wallace was at least speaking to the two major concerns of the people in the nation--inflation and fear of another war--and because they were the two major concerns of the people they were "effective issues with the voters."⁶ Eleanor continued to place her emphasis on how the average man felt; and, placing that concern into political perspective she sharply warned, "this [1948] election points up a very simple thing--namely, that the republicans and democrats alike had better bestir themselves to remove the people's two greatest anxieties, or the course of our government in the next few years may be surprising to both parties."⁷ Although she did not enjoy the fact that a liberal, third party candidate, Henry Wallace, was challenging the party coalition built by her husband, she was nevertheless quick to point out why the movement might look attractive to the average man.

In addition to the Wallace candidacy, Truman was also threatened briefly by a draft Eisenhower movement of which

⁵Ibid., p. 136.

⁶Allen Yarnell, Democrats and Progressives (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 55.

⁷Ibid.

three of Eleanor's sons (James, Elliott and Franklin, Jr.) were a part. This fact immediately caused the White House to inquire of Eleanor's stand, as her support was essential to Truman's success.⁸ In responding to inquiries regarding her support, Eleanor stated that as a United Nations delegate it was her intention to stay out of pre-conventional political activities which meant taking no stand for any particular candidate. Analyzing the situation, once again, in a very objective manner, Eleanor cited what she considered the reason behind the draft Eisenhower movement. "There is without question among the younger democrats," she stated, "a feeling that the party as at present constituted is going down to serious defeat and may not be able to survive as the liberal party. Whether they are right or wrong I do not know."⁹

Eleanor at this time was able to maintain a totally impersonal, unemotional, and almost indifferent attitude. In fact, because she was not emotionally involved in political campaigning during the 1948 election she was able to maintain an absolutely impersonal attitude toward the entire campaign. This was one national election where Eleanor Roosevelt was standing outside looking in and was therefore able to view candidates from a well-rounded perspective. She was, however, committed to the Democratic Party and vowed her support of the candidate selected by that party, which was Harry Truman.

⁸Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 140.

⁹Ibid.

The reelection of Harry Truman in 1948 allowed Eleanor to continue serving as a delegate to the United Nations, so for four more years she continued devoting her all to that particular task. Just after the 1948 election she did urge the Democratic Party members to keep the President and his advisors moving on a liberal basis, but for the most part her total devotion was to serving as a United Nations delegate.¹⁰

Even when the election of 1952 was approaching, Eleanor was heavily involved in trying to lead the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations in deciding upon an agreement on two covenants and, as such, devoted little time to politics.¹¹ Because of her absorption with the United Nations, and her feeling that democratic delegates would not be interested in hearing a speech on that topic, Eleanor initially decided not to attend the Democratic Convention that year. Upon receiving a personal request from President Truman, however, she changed her mind and delivered a speech which was later described as receiving "the greatest ovation ever given a woman at a national political convention."¹² In closing her speech she had read to the delegates a portion of a speech on international cooperation that Franklin had planned to deliver before his death:

¹⁰Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹Ibid., p. 202.

¹²Hickock and Roosevelt, Ladies of Courage, p. 286.

"If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships--the ability of all people of all kinds, to live together and work together in the same world, at peace."¹³

The demonstration exhibited upon the close of her speech was a clear indication that Franklin D. Roosevelt--his programs, his ideas, his aspirations, and the feeling of security he gave the Americans--had by no means been forgotten and that Eleanor Roosevelt was the symbol of all those things for which he had stood. The song which was played as she entered the convention hall ("Happy Days Are Here Again") was so appropriate because, for a moment, the delegates were once again recalling those "happy days" during which F.D.R. presided--and what better way to recall those times than through the living symbol of the man so instrumental in making them so. It would not be wrong to say that the inspiration Eleanor Roosevelt brought to the Democratic Convention did more to unite the delegates and remind them of what their party stood for than any other activity or speaker; and by that time in the Truman Administration it was a desperately needed inspiration for the Democratic Party. Although 1948 had brought the Democratic Party back into a majority status in Congress, Truman never successfully launched his Fair Deal program, and thus, his 1948 campaign attacks on the "do-nothing" Republican Congress had turned on him. That along with numerous charges of corruption and Communism

¹³Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 204.

within the administration, resulted in his alienation by powerful party leaders.¹⁴

In 1952 Adlai Stevenson was rather easily nominated by the Democratic Party to serve as its Presidential candidate and was quickly endorsed by Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁵ Eleanor's belief in the ability of Adlai Stevenson to serve successfully as President grew as the 1952 campaign progressed. She said later that Adlai had not been able to organize his campaign as well as she had hoped he would, but she felt nevertheless that he would make a good President. She commended his knowledge of the world, which would aid him in foreign policy, and noted his experience in dealing with the state legislature as governor of Illinois, which could help in his relations with Congress. Probably most of all, Eleanor felt that Stevenson had an inspiring, simplified, poised, and witty manner of making people understand even the most complicated of topics.¹⁶

The support of Eleanor Roosevelt, who was among the five most admired living Americans according to a March 1952 survey, was by no means enough to gain the presidency for Adlai Stevenson because at the top of the "five most admired" list was Dwight Eisenhower.¹⁷ The 1952 timing was

¹⁴Robert A. Divine, Foreign Policy and U.S. Presidential Elections, 1952-1960 (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1974), p. 123.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁶Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 208.

¹⁷Louis Harris, Is There a Republican Majority? (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 56.

perfect for Eisenhower, a dominant military figure, who proposed strong and firm leadership in international affairs to reduce tension and fear of war, just as in 1932 F.D.R. had proposed strong and firm leadership in domestic affairs to bring the country back on its feet from depression. Franklin Roosevelt and the democrats had served five full terms in the Executive Branch. Their coalition had grown out of economic self-interest which had dominated the domestic affairs of the nation. But by 1952, a new coalition had arisen in a period when foreign policy dominated the interest and affairs of the nation. Eisenhower was providing the same sense of security to those worried about international problems that Franklin Roosevelt had provided to those who worried about the Depression in 1932. Also, by 1952 many young people who knew little of the New Deal were of voting age. Eisenhower's promise to "shake off the focus of the past" so as to be "able to solve modern problems in mid-century America" was appealing to them.¹⁸

The 1952 presidential election was without doubt a new turning point in Eleanor Roosevelt's life. Although the United Nations appointment was of a nonpartisan nature, Eleanor resigned as a delegate. Direct access to President Truman had served many purposes for her. As she later recalled, "I was able to get to the President what I thought the non-government organizations and the women of this country generally felt on a great many subjects, as well as

¹⁸Ibid., p. 214.

the routine reports of what had occurred and my opinion of what other nations felt."¹⁹ She knew she would lose the access under a new republican president and offered her resignation to President Eisenhower. It was promptly accepted. The symbolism of Franklin D. Roosevelt was no longer present within the United Nations--it was a new era, an era of new problems and new ideas, an era in which the memories of yesterday had become history.

It was during the 1956 presidential campaign that Eleanor played a central role and became a key figure in the Democratic Party campaign. Without question, this was the hardest Eleanor had ever worked for any candidate.²⁰ She was no longer a United Nations delegate and, although her days were already filled, she campaigned "madly for Adlai."²¹ Eleanor felt that Adlai Stevenson was not a good political organizer or campaigner, but there was no doubt in her mind that he would make a good president. She advised him on numerous occasions concerning campaign tactics. It disappointed her at times that he did not take her advice, but that never lessened her support of him.²²

During the 1956 campaign one is able to witness, for the first time, Eleanor's skill in using political tactics

¹⁹Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 211.

²⁰Eleanor Roosevelt, "On Stevenson, Truman and Kennedy," Saturday Evening Post, March 18, 1958, p. 36.

²¹Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 235.

²²Roosevelt, "On Stevenson, Truman and Kennedy", p. 72.

and political maneuverability in promoting her candidate, Adlai Stevenson. Where, in the past, Eleanor's tendency had been to move full force into something she felt was a moral necessity, during the Stevenson campaign she, perhaps unknowingly, exhibited a hint of the same political maneuverability as had been used by her husband during his political life. She had become more patient in waiting for the right time and more tolerant of opposing points of view.

Eleanor's tolerance was perhaps more visible in her approach to the civil rights issue. The task facing the Democrats was that of drawing up a platform which would proclaim the moral necessity of civil rights and, at the same time, retain support of the south. One of the major campaign issues, especially in the south, was enforcement of the Supreme Court's 1954 school desegregation decision. Should the federal government go so far as to withhold federal monies and send federal troops to localities which failed to comply with the Court's decision? Although Eleanor's moral and personal principles told her that such federal initiatives were necessary in order to get real action, her political judgement realistically told her that such a stance would alienate a majority of southern voters, which would destroy Stevenson's chance in the south. Her major task at that moment was to get Adlai Stevenson elected President. Therefore, Eleanor set aside the moral aspects out of political necessity and publicly backed Stevenson's stand against coercive action by the federal government.

Immediately, Stevenson's stand was publicly attacked by N.A.A.C.P. President Roy Wilkins, who felt that a stand for moderation and gradualism meant little or no progress in the area of civil rights. Eleanor was quick to acknowledge Wilkin's statement and referred to Stevenson's record on civil rights as sufficient reason for N.A.A.C.P. support.

The difference between Eleanor Roosevelt and Roy Wilkins came to a head when Eleanor submitted her resignation as a member of the N.A.A.C.P.; but after talking it over with Wilkins and other organization leaders, who agreed not to make anti-Stevenson, anti-democratic statements, she decided to remain a member.²³

Eleanor worked vigorously on getting an acceptable civil rights plank for the Democratic Party, one which would be able to retain backing of both the southern white voters and the party's staunch civil rights supporters. And to those civil rights supporters who felt the platform was too weak she said:

"You can't move so fast that you try to change the mores faster than the people can accept it. That doesn't mean you do nothing, but it means you do the things that need to be done according to priority."²⁴

In the past years when Eleanor saw an end to achieve she cared less about the practicality of the means used to achieve that end result. But now, in order to achieve the end result toward which she was diligently working, getting

²³Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 247.

²⁴Ibid., p. 251.

Adlai Stevenson elected, she was carefully studying the means being used to attain that end result. At this point in her life, Eleanor seems to have developed a stronger sense of balance between idealism and pragmatism. Her devotion to human rights had changed in no way, and she remained a liberal democrat; but her idealism and political innocence had been somewhat tempered with realism and toughness.²⁵

This change in Eleanor's approach could probably be accounted for by her work in the United Nations Human Rights Commission where she had to deal with both frustration and success, and where patience and compromise were so essential to maintaining unity. In 1956, party unity was necessary for a successful presidential campaign.²⁶

Once the primaries were over and the democrat platform agreed upon, Eleanor was prepared to remain behind the scenes; but, at the request of Adlai and other Democratic Party leaders, she appeared at the Democratic Party Convention. Her speech, centering on the theme that it was time for new beginnings, stating that the New Deal era was good but it was history ... that new problems had confronted the nation ... and must be met by the Democratic Party's young and

²⁵James MacGregor Burns and Janet Thompson Burns, "Mrs. Roosevelt at a Remarkable 75," New York Times Magazine, October 4, 1959, p. 19.

²⁶Arthur Schlesinger, History of American Presidential Elections, Vol. IV: 1940-1968 (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1971), p. 2698.

vigorous leadership . . . , was labeled by one listener as the "greatest convention speech . . . heard."²⁷

Partly because the New Deal era had passed, Eisenhower and the Republican Party defeated Stevenson and the Democratic Party. Some attributed the defeat to the fact that the Stevenson campaign "stressed themes that seem ill-timed or out of time with the nation's mood."²⁸ Foreign policy had continued to be the issue of most concern to the nation, but Stevenson had not centered upon it; instead he had focused on Eisenhower and Nixon and he later admitted his "failure to evoke any real debate of issues."²⁹

Following the 1956 election Eleanor initially remarked that she was content to be out of politics and added that her children had warned her to slow down and refrain from any serious campaigning in 1960. At the level of state politics, however, Eleanor felt strongly that the Democratic Party in New York was not moving in a direction which would allow for a high level of participation by the people. She felt that Carmine DeSapio, the party machine leader in New York, had the elected representatives answering to him rather than to their constituents as a whole. For that reason she worked diligently toward reforming the New York Democratic Party.³⁰

²⁷Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 252.

²⁸Schlesinger, History of American Presidential Elections, p. 2700.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Burns and Burns, "Mrs. Roosevelt at a Remarkable 75," p. 42.

For three years Eleanor campaigned to bring democracy into the party by working to defeat DeSapio related candidates. She later claimed that no endeavor had ever meant more to her.³¹

Although in 1956 Eleanor had shown more tolerance for political maneuvering and more willingness to go along with political compromising, she still had her limits as to the amount of pragmatism she would tolerate in politics. This became evident in 1960 when her attitudes toward the pool of Democratic Party presidential candidates became known.

Eleanor was described as being "cool" toward Lyndon B. Johnson, as she felt he was too much of a maneuverer and did not reveal his basic convictions. Hubert Humphrey, she felt, had that spark of presidential greatness, but his inexperience resulted in Eleanor doubting his ability to win the campaign.³²

Eleanor's negative feelings toward likely presidential candidates included John F. Kennedy, the front-runner. Her reasons for disliking Kennedy were much more complex than those she gave against Johnson and Humphrey. First, she disliked nominating a candidate who had, in her opinion, been evasive in taking a firm stand against McCarthyism. On that issue, thought Eleanor, Kennedy had simply carried his pragmatism too far. Moreover, the keen, well-mapped campaign formed by the Kennedy machine represented too much maneuvering for the sake of winning the nomination and not enough

³¹Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 271.

³²Ibid., p. 275.

principle. During the 1960 presidential campaign, for example, Robert Kennedy stated to a group of New York Democrats which included Eleanor, "I don't give a damn for Carmine DeSapio and I don't give a damn about anyone in this room, either. All I want is to elect my brother President of the United States."³³ Eleanor's moral reservations about the Kennedy machine are not difficult to imagine in the light of such hard-nosed pragmatism.

Eleanor was also apprehensive about Kennedy's Catholicism, first because she feared bringing the church into politics, but more importantly because she saw the Catholic Church as a very conservative influence, one that would compromise liberal principles too much.

When all was said and done Eleanor still thought Adlai Stevenson was the only person with sufficient maturity to be President and, therefore, she could not accept anyone of the younger generation. Nobody, she thought, measured up to him. It was not long before Eleanor was writing letters asking some of the high-powered democrats to refrain from announcing support for particular candidates (mainly Kennedy) until the convention. Finally, she publicly announced her support for Stevenson so strongly that Stevenson momentarily abandoned his non-candidate stance in a note to Eleanor which read, "My dear Mrs. R--I surrender!! With love, Adlai."³⁴

³³Herbert S. Parmet, The Democrats: The Years After F.D.R. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), p. 180.

³⁴Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 287.

Thus, Eleanor's initial aloofness from the struggle had turned into vigorous, open support for Adlai Stevenson.

Eleanor's feeling that only Stevenson was sufficiently mature and principled to be President was inconsistent with her stand since 1945 which urged the younger generation to take over and learn to manage the Democratic Party. She was now opposing the nomination of the candidate who symbolized that younger generation which she had so often encouraged to take charge. Even her feeling toward Hubert Humphrey, that he was promising but too inexperienced, shows that Eleanor was not really ready to let go to the younger generation.

The 1960 primary results and the Democratic convention's overwhelming nomination of John Kennedy revealed that the younger generation had, in fact, taken over management of the Democratic Party. Democratic Party delegates gave Eleanor a standing ovation when she entered the convention. Her popularity and prestige could still arouse the emotions of party members; but, unlike 1956, she did not have the political influence to change the votes of delegates. In that sense, Eleanor was a well-respected, highly loved symbol of the things for which the Democratic Party stood ... but little more. John Kennedy made numerous efforts to gain the support of Eleanor because, although she was not a powerful political leader, she was a powerful symbol of a "familiar past, a safer and more glorious past."³⁵

³⁵Theodore White, The Making of a President (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1961), p. 155.

At the request of John Kennedy, Eleanor agreed to meet with him at Hyde Park in August 1960. Kennedy was delighted that Eleanor would agree to the meeting, but at the same time he felt an intense apprehension and requested that his New York coordinator, William Walton, accompany him. He went so far as to compare the meeting to that between the Czar and Napoleon which resulted in the Treaty of Tilsit. The anxiety exhibited by Kennedy toward this meeting indicates the extent to which Eleanor continued to be a very powerful symbol of liberal politics, even to the new generation of pragmatists.

As the 1960 presidential campaign progressed, a mutual respect developed between Kennedy and Eleanor, thus narrowing the generation gap to a degree. After her meeting with Kennedy, she gave this assessment of him in a private letter:

"My final judgement now is that here is a man who wants to leave a record (perhaps for ambitious personal reasons as people say) but I rather think because he really is interested in helping the people of his own country and mankind in general."³⁶

Even though her respect for Kennedy was growing she continued to maintain a certain distance from him. She seems to have been wary of becoming simply another symbol for the new President to manipulate. After her meeting with him, she complained that the Kennedy people seemed more

³⁶Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p.294.

interested in publicity photos than in her ideas.³⁷ So when Kennedy asked her to stand with him in the Presidential box on inauguration day, she politely declined saying that she could get a better view standing below the inaugural platform.³⁸

Eleanor died on November 7, 1962, and, therefore, did not live to see Kennedy's last months in office. She had learned to respect the new President, but kept her distance to the end. Eleanor was, as always, a woman of principle.

³⁷Parmet, The Democrats: The Years After F.D.R., p. 180.

³⁸Lash, Eleanor: The Years Alone, p. 296.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Growing up in a broken home in her early years, being labeled "granny" by her mother because she was so old-fashioned, being an orphan by age ten, all resulted in a shy, solemn Eleanor Roosevelt who, later in life, referred to herself as an ugly duckling, feared displeasing people, and feared ridicule. In spite of her shattered childhood, her dominating mother-in-law, and the gigantic shadow cast by her husband in the White House, Eleanor Roosevelt managed to make a person of herself in her own right. And though she so often acted on what she considered her duty, because others expected it of her, she never really lost her sense of being independent of what others expected of her. Therefore, it may not be in spite of but rather because of such things as her broken home childhood, her dominating mother-in-law, etc., that Eleanor blossomed into the "First Lady of the World." Eleanor claimed later in life that her main purpose in life had been to show that "one can overcome obstacles that seem insurmountable ... that in spite of timidity and fear ... one can find a way to live widely and fully."¹

¹Kenneth Crawford, "Her Glow Warmed the World," Newsweek, 60 (November 19, 1962): 47.

Whatever the causes, Eleanor Roosevelt was a remarkable woman whose character combined the supposedly opposite traits of headstrong determination and humble compassion. This special combination of traits enabled her to touch the lives of many in a magical sort of way.

Eleanor adopted every cause in which she saw merit, every individual in whom she saw potential for betterment, and, in doing so, sometimes overlooked reality. In all her goodness, in all her efforts to achieve equality, to prevent human suffering and to achieve justice for all people, Eleanor tended to be overly optimistic in her hopes of making the world as it should be.

Many liberals before and after Eleanor Roosevelt's time promoted causes only as "idealistic abstractions." It is the contention of this writer that although Eleanor was an idealist, she was different from most liberals. Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the few liberals who, as conservative critic William Buckley has observed, was moved "by pure moral compassion, feeling deeply a compassion for all human people."² In other words, Eleanor never segregated herself from human beings by a wall of abstractions. She cared for people in the masses, but more importantly, she cared for people as individuals.

There was the time, for example, that a discharged soldier thought he saw a lady who resembled Eleanor Roosevelt

²William F. Buckley, Up From Liberalism (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1968), p. 71.

on the subway. He commented to his wife that the lady couldn't be Mrs. Roosevelt, not on the subway! He moved closer and she looked up from her magazine to speak to him. She then noticed the veteran's button on his lapel and proceeded to ask him a number of specific questions regarding his adjustment to civilian life. The fact that she listened to him, his gripes and his solutions, truly inspired the young man because he felt that she took at least part of what he had said and made someone in Washington, D.C., aware of it.³

When Eleanor and President Roosevelt made visits to Warm Springs, Georgia, local farm women would walk for miles in their poke bonnets and heavy men's work boots to attend receptions that Eleanor would have for them. They always brought the Roosevelts presents of the only thing they had to give--peach marmalade--and Eleanor would later send them individual notes thanking them for their kindness.⁴

Examples such as the ones presented above are provided simply to illustrate the compassion, the humanitarian attitude, and the simplicity that Eleanor Roosevelt exhibited in her every move. Her manner was ordinary; the average person could relate to her; yet her touch was inspirational; and in the eyes of the average person with whom she came in contact Eleanor Roosevelt was a saint.

³Stella Hershman, A Woman of Quality (Hyde Park, New York: Hyde Park Gift Shop, 1970), p. 228.

⁴Ibid., p. 234.

One writer claimed that it was not what Eleanor Roosevelt did, or thought, or said that will make her remembered; rather, it was what Eleanor Roosevelt was that will make people remember her. No problem was so large that it was abstract to her. She went everywhere as herself--a woman concerned with woman things--which meant human things. "Wherever she was things got human and the people could feel it; things got simpler."⁵ Eleanor Roosevelt was a living example of those things for which she moralized, and because of that she became a legend and inspiration.

The contribution to liberal politics made by Eleanor Roosevelt was mainly symbolic. As a living example of what she preached, she strengthened the humanitarian image of the Democratic Party. Her influence beyond the symbolic sphere was not great. She was not a powerful mover behind the major policies of her husband's New Deal, but concentrated her efforts on lesser projects such as Authurdale. Nor did she ever become a powerful force in moving the machinery of the Democratic Party. The mechanics of party politics tended to arouse her intense indignation when tied to the corruption of Carmine DeSapio's Tammany Hall, or her distaste when linked to John F. Kennedy's smoothly running electoral machine in 1960.

Yet Eleanor continued to be a force to be reckoned with in Democratic Party politics because of her appeal as

⁵Archibald Macleish, "Eleanor Roosevelt: 1884-1962," Nation 195 (November 17, 1962): 317.

a symbol, usually far more convincing than the party's leaders, of the party's humanitarian ideas. After her husband's death, a series of Democratic presidents and presidential hopefuls were keenly aware of her importance as a living symbol. Her greatest admirer among these was Adlai Stevenson. Had he ever become President, Eleanor might have become more than a symbol. She might well have become an influential member of Stevenson's "kitchen cabinet," a group of powerful presidential confidants and advisors outside of the government. Ironically, she might have had far more influence on key policies in a Stevenson administration than she had on her husband's administration.

But Stevenson never reached the White House, and Eleanor remained a living symbol for liberal politics. She made the symbolism less abstract and more humanitarian, more down-to-earth, and, as a result, was a major force which attracted the average citizen to the party. In that sense, Eleanor Roosevelt stood as proof that politics is more than campaign techniques and party organization; that symbolism and idealism do, in fact, play a large role in determining the popularity and success of a political party.

When she died, Adlai Stevenson took note of the inspirational impact of Eleanor's personality on liberal politics and beyond. "Like so many others," he said, "I

have lost more than a beloved friend. I have lost an inspiration. She would rather light a candle than curse the darkness, and her glow warmed the world."⁶

⁶Kenneth Crawford, "Her Glow Warmed the World,"
Newsweek 60 (November 19, 1962): 47.

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