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## **The Legacy of Winston Churchill Transcript**

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## The Legacy of Sir Winston Churchill

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Ladies and gentlemen, this lecture is intended to commemorate Winston Churchill, who died just 50 years ago on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1965. He had left the House of Commons three months earlier, in October 1964, having first become an MP in 1900, in the last Parliament of Queen Victoria's reign. He is, of course, best remembered for his leadership during the Second World War, but he had in fact been a member of various Cabinets for nearly 30 years: two Liberal Cabinets, three Coalition Cabinets, and four Conservative Cabinets. This vast span is unparalleled in British history, except by Gladstone and perhaps by Balfour. Indeed, Churchill's career in politics was so various that it is virtually impossible to summarise in 60 minutes. Indeed, almost any account of his career is bound to be incomplete. It seems to me, paradoxically, that many of his achievements, apart from his Wartime leadership, are less well-known than they should be, and I confess, when I began preparing this lecture, I thought I should find his achievements had been too much celebrated, but, somewhat to my surprise, I found that his political legacy is actually greater than I had previously thought.

What I propose to do is to draw up a balance sheet of Churchill's achievements but also of his misjudgements, and then to show why it is a futile exercise in the case of a man who was the saviour of his country.

Now, Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace, the ancestral home of his grandfather, the Duke of Marlborough, in November 1874. His father was the youngest son of the Duke of Marlborough and as such had a courtesy title, Lord Randolph Churchill. His mother was an American, Jennie Jerome. Someone was later to describe Churchill as half-American and all-British.

Churchill's father had a meteoric political career. He was first elected to the House of Commons in 1874 as a Conservative at the age of 25, and proved himself a great parliamentarian and popular orator. By 1886, at the age of 37, he was the second man in his party, Leader of the House of Commons, and Chancellor of the Exchequer, the youngest Chancellor since Pitt, but after less than five months in the Cabinet, he resigned on an issue of economy and government and was never to hold office again. He died at the age of 46, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1895, curiously on the same date as his son 70 years later. Lord Randolph Churchill then was a brilliant failure, and his son was haunted throughout his life with the thought that his career might imitate that of his father, and that he too might be written off as a glorious failure.

Churchill was educated at Harrow School and there was a general belief, which he did nothing to discourage, that he was something of a dunce at school, and indeed Churchill played on that for effect. In 1946, he was given an honorary degree at the University of Miami and he said: "I am surprised that in my later I should have become so experienced in taking degrees when, as a schoolboy, I was so bad at passing examinations. In fact, one might almost say that no one ever passed so few examinations and received so many degrees. From this, a superficial thinker might argue that the way to get the most degrees is to fail in the most examinations. This would, however, ladies and gentlemen, be a conclusion unedifying in the academic atmosphere in which I now preen myself, and I therefore hasten to draw another moral with which I am sure we shall all be in accord, namely, that no boy or girl should ever be disheartened by lack of success in their youth but should diligently and faithfully continue to persevere and make up for lost time."

Now, Churchill was not a dunce at school. He won a school prize for reciting by heart 400 lines from Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome". He wrote an essay on the future history of an attack on Russia. Anyone who can do that is not a dunce. At Sandhurst, he was near the top of his class in military tactics and strategy. Perhaps the truth is that he did well at those subjects he enjoyed, while ignoring the rest.

Upon leaving school, Churchill joined the army and was posted to India. In 1896, when he was nearly 22, as he says in his delightful autobiography "My Early Life", in my view one of the most attractive autobiographies in the English language, "The desire for learning came upon me. I began to feel myself wanting in even the vaguest knowledge about the many large spheres of thought." He sought, as he was later to put it at Miami, to make up for lost time, and he asked his mother to send him books, beginning with the 12 volumes of Macaulay's "History". When the books arrived, he devoured them, reading for four or five hours a day, beginning with Macaulay and Gibbon, before going on to Plato's "Republic", Aristotle's "Politics", Schopenhauer on pessimism, Malthus on population, and Darwin "On the Origin of Species", together, as he says, with other books of a lesser standing, and then a number of books on religion, which had the effect I think of making him doubtful about the literal truths of Christianity. He was later to say that he was a buttress of the Church of England from outside

rather than a pillar from within. But he also retained I think a belief in providence and a belief, more particularly, that providence had marked him out for great things.

Churchill was, I think, more than most politicians, the product of his education and its most important effect was to confirm his belief in the importance of history. He used to say that the further you looked back into the past, the further you can peer into the future. His historical intuition was to serve him well, and his love of language persuaded him that he could write, though in fact most of his books were dictated. He once said, "I lived from mouth to hand." He set about producing books with characteristic energy. By the time he entered Parliament in 1900, at the age of 25, the same age as his father, he had already published five books: four on the various military campaigns in which he had participated, and a novel, "Savrola". His romantic work is written in the style of "A Prisoner of Zenda" and is not rated very highly by most people. Indeed, Churchill did not rate it highly himself. He says in his autobiography, "I have consistently urged my friends to abstain from reading it."

Churchill is often thought to have been a natural speaker. In fact, he found impromptu speaking difficult, and that was in part the result of a minor speech impediment, a lisp. Churchill had to apply extraordinary self-discipline to become the fine speaker with whom we all familiar. At the beginning of his parliamentary career, he learnt his speeches by heart, but in 1904, in the House of Commons, he lost the thread of his argument and had to sit down in the middle of his speech. After that, he brought with him copious notes in case he should suffer a further breakdown. His great friend, F.E. Smith, said that Churchill had devoted the best years of his life to preparing his impromptu speeches. Every speech that Churchill made was the result of long and careful preparation, and even as Wartime Prime Minister, he would devote time to preparing his speeches, believing that their inspirational qualities were a more important contribution to victory than executive or administrative work, and who can say that he was wrong?

It is however fair to say that, in his early years, Churchill struck many people as a somewhat bumptious and opinionated young man. He tacitly accepts that view in his autobiography. He tells us that, on his first day in India, in Bombay, he was invited to dinner by the Governor at Government House. "His Excellency, after the health of the Queen Empress had been drunk and dinner was over, was good enough to ask my opinion upon several matters, and considering the magnificent character of his hospitality, I thought it would be unbecoming in me not to reply fully. I have forgotten the particular points of British and Indian affairs upon which he sought my counsel. All I can remember is that I responded generously. There were indeed moments when he seemed willing to impart his own views, but I thought it would be ungracious to put him to so much trouble and he very readily subsided."

A little later, one of Churchill's close friends said: "The first time you meet Winston, you see all his faults, and the rest of your life you spend in discovering his virtues."

Now, Churchill was elected to Parliament in 1900 as a Conservative, like his father, and his prime aim in the first phase of his political career was to vindicate his father's reputation. His father admittedly had not treated him well and frequently bullied him, but Churchill greatly admired him and was sad that his father's early death meant that he was unable to act as his Political Secretary. "All my dreams of comradeship with him, of entering Parliament at his side and in his support were ended. There remained for me only to pursue his aims and vindicate his memory." He vindicated the memory of his father by writing a two-volume biography of around 1,000 pages, which appeared in 1906. It is a remarkable work for a man of 31 and it remains of great scholarly value, being based on extensive quotations from his father's private papers and on interviews with his political colleagues, but in the course of writing this biography, Churchill's political views began to change since he began to think that the Conservative Party had betrayed his father's legacy. In Churchill's view, that legacy consisted of the idea of Tory democracy, an idea first put forward by Disraeli, and that idea was that the Conservatives could only prosper if they were a party of social reform, and instead, in Churchill's view, since his father's downfall, the Conservatives had become a reactionary party and they were being led by the same people, Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour, who, in Churchill's view, had betrayed his father and they were leading the Conservative Party in the wrong direction.

There was a further intellectual influence on Churchill. In 1901, he read a book by a liberal philanthropist, Seebohm Rowntree, called "Poverty, A Study in Town Life", and Rowntree showed that in York, Leeds and Sheffield, of 3,600 recruits applying to join the army in the period of the Boer War, over a quarter had to be rejected as unfit, and a further 30% could be accepted only on a provisional basis, and moreover, that around half the children in York were showing signs of malnutrition. This book made a profound impression upon

Churchill. "I see little glory," he said, "in an Empire which can rule the waves and is unable to flush the sewers."

At Glasgow, in 1906, he said, "I do not want to impair the vigour of competition, but we can do much to mitigate the consequences of failure. We want to draw a line below which we will not allow persons to live and labour, yet above which they may compete with all the strength of their manhood."

In the 1950s, he was to say that, under Conservative rule, there must be both a ladder on which everyone could climb, but also a safety net below which no one should be allowed to fall.

His interest in social reform played a major part in his decision to join the Liberals, to cross the floor of the House in 1904, though he gave as his main reason the need to defend free trade against Conservative proposals for tariff reform.

Now, the formal Liberal Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery, said that Churchill had been "sworn to Toryism too young to know the meaning of the oath", but there were many who attributed this change of party to self-interest and desire for office because, by 1904, it was coming to look as if the Conservative Government would shortly end and that the Liberals would win the next General Election, as in fact they did. Churchill had to face the accusation that he was unreliable, an accusation that was to dog him for much of his political career.

When the Liberals came to power in December 1905, Churchill was given junior office, and in 1908, when Asquith became Prime Minister, he entered the Cabinet at the age of just 33 as President of the Board of Trade. In that office, he prepared the world's first unemployment insurance scheme. He said that unemployment insurance was "an untrodden field of politics", because no other country had such a scheme - Britain's was the first. The insurance scheme illustrated what Churchill, rather grandiloquently, called "the miracle of averages". It was set up on the basis of contributions from employer, employees and the State, such that it was designed to balance when unemployment was around 8.3% of the insured population. It was to breakdown with the advent of mass unemployment in the 1920s, when the insurance aspect had to be abandoned. But Churchill's scheme ended the traditional view that the receipt of unemployment benefit stigmatised the person claiming it. Churchill did not want any stigma attached to those who were so unfortunate as to be out of work, and for the same reason, he rejected the idea put forward by the Webbs that, in return for benefits, evidence of good character should be obtained. He said, "I do not like mixing up moralities and mathematics. Our concern is with the evil, not with the causes, with the fact of unemployment, and not with the character of the unemployed." These sentiments might get him expelled from both political parties today, I fear. He argued that the insurance principle was the best guarantor against abuse since a malingerer would simply waste his benefits paid for by his contributions and would therefore not be able to draw on benefit when he really needed it.

Churchill was also responsible for the establishment of labour exchanges, which were a corollary to unemployment insurance, and to administer them, he appointed William Beveridge, later to be the author of a famous report on social insurance in Churchill's Wartime Government in 1952.

In addition, Churchill introduced the first minimum wage scheme for workers in what were known as "sweated trades", that is casual trades - the docks, tailoring and dressmaking.

His contribution to national insurance was for long obscured because, by the time the 1911 National Insurance Act was introduced into Parliament, he was no longer at the Board of Trade, but unemployment insurance had to wait until Lloyd George had completed his complementary scheme of health insurance, so that both could be introduced together, but just as Lloyd George was the architect of health insurance, so Churchill was the prime architect of unemployment insurance.

Now, of Churchill's time at the Board of Trade, Beveridge wrote in his autobiography that "It offered a striking illustration of how much the personality of the Minister, in a few critical months, may change the course of social legislation."

In my view, Churchill can be regarded as one of the founders of the welfare state, so that, even if his political career had ended in 1914, he would still have bequeathed a very considerable political memorial, and certainly his political stock was high by the time he left the Board of Trade in 1910.

In 1908, a commentator had speculated on his future political career: "Can one who is devoured life with such feverish haste retain his zest to the end of the feast? How will 40 find him, that fatal 40, when the youth of rose light and romance has faded into the light of common day and the horizon of life has shrunk incalculably and when the flagging spirit no longer answers to the spur of external things but must find its motive and energy from within or find them not at all?"

Shortly before Churchill was 40, in August 1914, the First World War broke out, and Churchill was First Lord of the Admiralty. Some thought that, in Wartime, he would be in his element, but from that point, things began to go wrong for him, and his reputation began a long decline, from which it was to be rescued only by the outbreak of the Second World War.

The prime reason for the collapse of Churchill's reputation in Wartime was of course the failure of the expedition to force the Dardanelles at Gallipoli. Gallipoli was certainly a bold conception and it resulted from Churchill's desire to minimise casualties by adopting an indirect approach in place of the trench warfare on the Western Front, and it was for the same reason that he wanted to delay a second front and he pressed for a Mediterranean strategy in the Second World War.

Now, after the First World War, Churchill wrote a multi-volume work about it, entitled "The World Crisis", which Arthur Balfour called "Winston's brilliant autobiography, disguised as a history of the universe". The book indicted Hague and the generals on the Western Front for pointless slaughter. In December 1914, Churchill had said to the Prime Minister, "There must be a better way to win the War than requiring soldiers," as he put it, "to chew barbed wire in Flanders." Curiously, Gallipoli was to win for Churchill the respect and admiration of his later political opponent, Attlee, who, although badly wounded in the Gallipoli campaign, continued to regard it as the most imaginative conception of the War.

Historians have long argued about this, but the general consensus today seems that, even if it had been properly managed, which it was not, it could never have succeeded because, even if Allied forces had established a foothold at Gallipoli, they would still have been at the mercy of hostile troops who could reach Gallipoli more easily by land than Allied troops could reach it by sea. The campaign took too little account, so most historians believe, of the brute facts of logistics, and perhaps the best that could be hoped for was that a foothold would be established, but then perhaps Allied troops would have become just as bogged down in trench warfare there as they were on the Western Front.

Churchill received most of the blame for failure. It was alleged that he had bullied the First Sea Lord and the naval experts in the Admiralty, against their better judgement, and had foisted upon them a plan that had little chance of success. That accusation is unfair. The plan was discussed in detail by the Admiralty and approved unanimously by the officers, and the War Council, which included Ministers senior to Churchill, also approved it unanimously. They also were looking for a more effective way to prosecute the War. But once the decision was made, the Admirals changed their mind and said that a naval attack on its own could not succeed, that troops would also be needed. Churchill, here, was culpable in not telling his colleagues of this change of mind, but I think they must have known about it all the same.

But if the expedition was, as I believe, fundamentally flawed, the greatest blame for it attaches not to Churchill but to others more senior to him and, in my view, particularly the Prime Minister, Asquith, because Churchill, while being a leading advocate of the Dardanelles, was by no means the only advocate nor the most senior advocate. But the other supporters of it were much more politically adroit than him. Once it was seen that the campaign had failed, they were nowhere to be seen. Churchill was not sufficient adroit to avoid the blame, and there was a sense in which he was too direct for the intrigues of high politics. But this was a crucial episode in his career. Up to that time, it had been one of unbroken success, or so it seemed. Now, he was associated with failure, and in 1915, he was demoted and then sacked from the Government. The Dardanelles were seen by many as an illustration of his unreliability. As late as 1923, he was shouted down at election meetings with cries

of "What about the Dardanelles?!" and in 1925, an American commentator made a remarkably false prediction when he said, "It is doubtful if even Great Britain could survive another war and another Churchill." In 1931, a biographer wrote of him: "The ghosts of the Gallipoli dead will always rise up to damn him anew in time of national emergency. Neither official historians nor military hack writers would explain away or wipe out the memories of the Dardanelles."

Churchill himself said: "I was ruined for the time being over the Dardanelles, and a supreme enterprise was cast away though my trying to carry out a major and combined operation of war from a subordinate position. Men are ill-advised to try such ventures."

The Dardanelles had a crucial effect on his thinking, in that it taught him that it was unwise to override the qualms of experts. During World War II, he never overruled the Chiefs of Staff when they were all agreed. He would argue with them endlessly, wearing them down into the small hours of the night, but if he could not convince them, he always gave way.

Now, Jeremy Paxman says in this week's Radio Times that Churchill ruled as a democratic dictator, that he was a strong man who waved a wand and everyone followed. Nothing could be further from the truth. During World War II, he deliberately surrounded himself with strong men: Bevin in the War Cabinet, Sir Alan Brooke as Chief of the General Staff. He said of Sir Alan Brooke, "What does he do when I thump the table and shout? He thumps the table harder and shouts louder back!" Churchill learnt from his mistakes, knew his weaknesses, and wanted men around him who could stand up to him and argue back. He did not like the inarticulate, one reason he didn't get on with General Wavell. He sought to convince others, not to overrule them.

Now, the Dardanelles damaged Churchill's career badly, it seemed for a while fatally, but he was brought back into Government by Lloyd George in 1917 and served until the downfall of the Lloyd George Coalition in 1922.

Here, despite constructive achievements, he confirmed in the mind of many his reputation for unreliability by advocating intervention in Russia to remove the Bolsheviks from power. Now, given the consequences of Bolshevism and in particular the terror unleashed in the 1930s by Stalin, some might say today this was an example of Churchill's prescience and the world might have been a better place if intervention had succeeded, because if that had happened, Hitler might well never have come to power since much of his appeal was based on fear of Communism. But most political leaders, and one suspects the British people as well, took the straightforward view that how Russia was governed was a matter for the Russians and that Britain should not be interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. The Government adopted a half-hearted policy of intervention which ended in failure, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff commented: "So ends in practical disaster another of Winston's military attempts," and Churchill was further discredited.

But even worse, his attitudes towards Communism conditioned his attitude towards the Labour Party. Before 1914, he had been broadly sympathetic to Labour, which he saw as one wing of a reforming coalition led by the Liberals, but in the 1920s, his attitude changed and he declared that "The enthronement in office of a Socialist Government would be a national misfortune, such as has usually befallen great states only on the morrow of defeat in war." The fact that the Liberals allowed the first Labour Government to take office led him to break with the Liberals in 1924 and in that year, he became a Conservative again. He made light of crossing the floor for the second time. He said, "Anyone can rat, but it takes a certain amount of ingenuity to re-rat." But of course, the episode increased his reputation for unreliability.

Now, with great generosity, Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Leader, appointed Churchill Chancellor of the Exchequer, but in that position, he was not, it is fair to say, a great success. There was little chance of pursuing policies of social reform in the depressed conditions of the 1920s, and Churchill mistakenly accepted the advice of experts that Britain should return to the Gold Standard, a measure which most economists believe deepened the depression.

His reputation was further undermined by the General Strike, when he was seen as a bitter opponent of the trade unions. Here, as with Gallipoli, Churchill's rhetoric disguised the reality. He regarded the Strike itself as a threat against the State and was determined that the Government should win it, but he was far more conciliatory

towards the miners than his colleagues. While others in the Government masked a tough position with conciliatory language, Churchill did the opposite, using the language of warfare to mark a conciliatory position, but once again, it was appearances that counted and the trade unions came to see him for a while as an enemy of organised labour.

Churchill's reputation as a fire-eating right-winger was confirmed when, in opposition in January 1931, he broke with the Conservative Shadow Cabinet because he opposed its support for constitutional progress in India, and this kept him in opposition until the outbreak of War in September 1939. It is sometimes said he was kept in opposition during the 1930s by pygmy leaders. That is not the case. He excluded himself by breaking with the Conservative Party Establishment on an issue on which liberal opinion thought he was quite wrong.

So, it is not enough, I think, to analyse Churchill's career simply by describing his great qualities and achievements. We also have to explain why he came to be so widely distrusted.

Now, his case against Indian self-government was not quite as preposterous as it is generally thought today. He believed that the unity of India, which of course then included what are now Pakistan and Bangladesh as well as present day India, was a British creation, and that, in the absence of British rule, ethnic and religious conflict between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs would lead to the disintegration of India and massacres between the different groups. In addition, he held that the princely states, which comprised a third of India, and where Britain exerted only an indirect influence, that these states could never be persuaded to join a self-governing India. These were not wholly foolish arguments, but his case was undermined by the wild rhetoric that he used, and in particular by his intemperate attacks on the Indian nationalist leader, Ghandi, which dismayed even those who agreed with him. He said, at one point in the 1930s, that the British Empire faced two mortal enemies, Ghandi and Hitler. He was devaluing the language of alarmism so that when he later used similar language about Hitler to the language he used about Ghandi, many thought that he was once again exaggerating.

Churchill's reputation plummeted further during the abdication crisis of 1936, when he took the side of Edward VIII, in part from generous motives, in romantic, indeed quixotic admiration for the monarchy, but also, it must be said, with a political motive to undermine the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, now his political enemy. To many in the political establishment, it seemed that Churchill was using a national crisis to further his own personal ends. Baldwin, on the other hand, was seen to have handled the crisis with great skill and to have ensured that the abdication did not damage the monarchy. This brought Baldwin to a pinnacle of acclaim and he retired shortly afterwards, to be succeeded by Neville Chamberlain.

Churchill, by contrast, fell even further in public esteem. By 1938, it seemed that, after nearly 40 years as an MP, he had hardly any political support at all. In 1938, he told a friend, "My opportunity has passed. I am going to leave public life." It seemed a repetition of his father's story.

Oddly enough, one political leader with whom Churchill was later to deal took a different view, the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. In 1932, Lady Astor, visiting the Soviet Union, told Stalin that Churchill was finished. Stalin disagreed - when Britain was once again in trouble, he said, the old warhorse would be summoned back once more.

In 1931, the writer Harold Nicholson had said: "He is a man who leads forlorn hopes, and when the hopes of England before forlorn, he will once again be summoned to leadership," and so it proved to be.

Now, by the late-1930s, Churchill was distrusted by all three parties. In addition to the fact he had twice crossed the floor, the Conservatives distrusted him because of his opposition to constitutional reform in India and to the policy of appeasement, the Liberals and the Labour Party distrusted him because of his advocacy of rearmament, while the Labour Party also distrusted him because of his stance during the General Strike. But, by a remarkable paradox, this man, distrusted by all three parties, became in 1940 the symbol of national unity, and the degree to which he became the symbol of national unity is clearly illustrated by the Gallop polls, which had begun operations in Britain in 1937. Until May 1940, perhaps surprisingly, Neville Chamberlain had enjoyed majority support in answer to the question of "How satisfied are you with the Prime Minister?" His support was around 55%. In July 1940, Churchill enjoyed 88% support. His support reached a peak of 93% in December 1942

and in June and August 1943, and in only one month in the War did satisfaction in his premiership fall below 80%.

All this of course was a consequence of Hitler. If Hitler had kept to the promise that he had made to Neville Chamberlain in 1938 that the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia were his last territorial claim in Europe, or even better, if Hitler had been assassinated, Churchill's career would have ended in failure, a brilliant failure like his father, but a failure.

On one occasion during the War, Churchill began what seemed like an interminable monologue about Hitler, with his ministerial colleague and successor as Prime Minister but one, Harold Macmillan. Macmillan began to tire of the monologue: "You mustn't be so critical of Hitler," he said. "What?" said Churchill, "I hope you are not going to ask me to speak sympathetically about that man," which was the term he always used to refer to Hitler. "No," replied Macmillan, "but it took Hitler to make you Prime Minister - no one else could have done it!" "Well, perhaps there is something in that," Churchill growled.

Now, the history of the 1930s is more complex than is often thought, and there is, I think, more to be said in favour of the foreign policies of Baldwin and Chamberlain than Churchill admitted in his War Memoirs. Nevertheless, on this occasion, the appearance of events favoured Churchill rather than, as with Gallipoli, the General Strike or India, making him appear at a disadvantage. Churchill, it appeared, had been right in his warnings and others had been wrong.

When Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940, Clement Attlee, the Leader of the Labour Party, became Deputy Prime Minister. In 1934, though a political opponent, Attlee had told the Commons that Churchill was "one of those brilliantly erratic geniuses, who, when he sees clearly, sees very, very clearly". Churchill and Attlee disagreed on many things, but writing in appreciation after Churchill's death in 1965, Attlee said: "If somebody asked me what exactly Winston did to win the War, I would say "Talk about it". "We all remember the inspiring speeches, and here, if the IT people can help, we can get one of them, which is a speech to the American Congress in January 1942, just after Pearl Harbour.

*[Audio plays]*

*"The fact that my American forbearers have for so many generations played their part in the life of the United States and that here I am, an Englishman, welcomed in your midst, makes this experience one of the most moving and thrilling in my life, which is already long and has not been entirely uneventful.*

*[Laughter]*

*I wish, indeed, that my mother, whose memory I cherish across the veil of years, could have been here to see. By the way, I cannot help reflecting that if my father had been American, and my mother British, instead of the other way around, I might have got here on my own!*

*[Laughter]*

*Sure I am that this day, now, we are the masters of our fate, that the task which has been set us is not above our strength, that its pains and toils are not beyond our endurance. As long as we have faith in our cause and an unconquerable willpower, salvation will not be denied us. In the words of the psalmist, "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings if heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." Not all the tidings will be evil. On the contrary: mighty strokes of war have already been dealt against the enemy - the glorious defence of their native soil by the Russian armies and people.*



*[Applause]*

*Wounds have been inflicted upon the Nazi tyranny and system which have bitten deep and will fester and inflame, not only in the Nazi body but in the Nazi mind. The boastful Mussolini has crumpled already. He is now but a lackey and a serf, the merest utensil of his master's will.*

*[Applause]*

*Many people have been astonished that Japan should, in a single day, have plunged into war against the United States and the British Empire. What kind of a people do they think we are? Is it possible they do not realise that we shall never cease to preserve against them until they have been taught a lesson which they and the world will never forget.*

*[Applause]*

*Here we are, together, facing a group of mighty foes who seek our ruin. Here we are, together, defending all that to free men is dear. Twice in a single generation, the catastrophe of World War has fallen upon us. Twice in our lifetime has the long arm of fate reached out across the ocean to bring the United States into the forefront of the battle. If we had kept together after the last War, if we had taken common measures for our safety, this renewal of the curse need never have fallen upon us.*

*[Applause]*

*Do we not owe it to ourselves, to our children, to tormented mankind, to make sure that these catastrophes do not engulf us for the third time? It is not given to us to peer into the mysteries of the future. Still, I avow my hope and faith, sure and inviolate, that in the days to come, the British and American people will, for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice, and in peace.*

*[Applause]*

But Churchill's contribution was not just in the form of speeches. Inspiration, by itself, would not have been sufficient, without competence and knowledge. Indeed, Churchill showed great strategic grasp during the War. Remembering the slaughter of the First World War, he was particularly concerned to avoid heavy military casualties, and that was the rationale for the bombing campaign, which has been much criticised. Churchill did not believe that bombing alone could win the War, but he hoped that it would reduce Allied casualties. Bombing certainly did not make invasion unnecessary, but in my view, it helped make it successful and so made a decisive contribution to victory. It was also to reduce casualties that Churchill opposed a second front in Europe until the Allies had real air superiority and armies trained to defeat the Wehrmacht, and he succeeding in convincing the Americans of this, and Roosevelt came down on Churchill's side, against his own Chief of Staff, General Marshall. The failure of the Dieppe Raid in 1942 shows how right Churchill was in opposing a second front.

Attlee said that "Churchill was the greatest leader in War this country has ever known," and the reason he gave was that he was able to solve the problem that democratic countries in total war find crucial and may find fatal: relations between the civil and the military leaders. That was a problem that neither Asquith nor Lloyd George had solved in the First World War, but in the Second, there was to be no repetition of the conflicts between the frocks and the brass-hats that had marked the First World War.

Churchill was unexpectedly defeated in the 1945 General Election. In opposition, he took up the cause of European unity, and that came about, so it seems in a curious way. A little over a year after the end of the War, in September 1946, Churchill was due to make a speech at Zurich University, but he was apparently in a very

grumpy mood before the speech. His son-in-law, Duncan Sandys, asked him why. Churchill replied that he was due to make a speech compared the British parliamentary system with the Swiss cantonal system of government. "But," Sandys objected, "you know nothing about it." "That is why I am so irritable," Churchill replied. Sandys suggested he give up this idea and instead make a speech on the question they had been discussing that very night at dinner, the future of Europe, and that, it is said, is how the Zurich speech came to be born.

Now, Churchill had called for European unity before the War. In an article in 1930, he had said: "The conception of a United States of Europe is right. Every step taken to that end which appeases the obsolete hatreds and vanished oppressions, which makes easier the traffic and reciprocal services of Europe, which encourages nations to lay aside their precautionary panoply, is good in itself." But then, in words that prefigured his post-War attitudes, he said: "But we have our own dream and our own task. We are with Europe but not of it. We are linked but not compromised."

A few days after the battle of El Alamein, in 1942, he said to his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, in 1942: "Hard as it is to say now, I look forward to a United States of Europe in which the barriers between the nations will be greatly minimised and unrestricted travel will be possible."

In his Zurich speech, Churchill said: "When the Nazi power was broken, I asked myself what was the best advice I could give my fellow citizens in our ravaged and exhausted continent. My counsel to Europe can be given in a single word: unite. We must," he said, "build a kind of United States of Europe." He then said, "I am now going to say something that will astonish you. The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany." That was a bold thing to say just 16 months after the defeat of Nazi Germany.

In June 1947, introducing what became known as the Marshall Plan, General Marshall, the US Secretary of State, said it was Churchill's call for a united Europe in his Zurich speech that had influenced his belief that the European countries could organise their own economic recovery, with financial help from the United States, so it can be argued that Churchill's speech played a large part in the genesis of the Marshall Plan.

But what did Churchill mean by Europe? He said the real demarcation between Europe and Asia was no chain of mountains, no natural frontier, but a system of beliefs and ideas which we call Western civilisation, which he had seen destroyed by two totalitarian ideologies – Communism and National Socialism. But Churchill believed that Communism, unlike Nazism, would be overcome peacefully. In a startling accurate prediction, he told his Private Secretary, Sir John Coleville, in 1953, that if he, Coleville, lived to his natural span, he would see the end of Communism in Europe since the Communists would be unable to digest what they had swallowed. Coleville died in 1987, just two years before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Churchill, when he received the Charlemagne Prize at Aachen in 1956, he said that the unity of Western Europe was desirable since only then would the states of Eastern Europe regain their independence. He did not think European unity should be confined to the countries of Western Europe. He said at Brussels in 1949, "The Europe we seek to unite is all Europe," and that dream, of course, was not realised until 2004, when the ex-Communist countries of Central Eastern Europe did in fact join the European Union.

But let us hear the speech that Churchill made on Europe at the foundation conference of the European movement in 1948...

*[Audio plays]*

*At The Hague are gathered 800 delegates representing 23 European nations, men and women of all walks of life. They, like France's Wartime Premier, Edouard Daladier, have come to seek the first United States of Europe. The Dutch royal couple, welcoming Mrs Churchill and Anthony Eden, greet the delegates, who include Leslie Hore-Belisha. Not sponsored by any one government, yet willed by every nation, The Hague meeting seems to the*

*people of Europe another groping but positive step for peace. Winston Churchill, in his role as world statesman, presides over the inaugural session. Party politics are thrust into the background, as the man who gave Europe back its freedom receives the acclaim of its representatives.*

*[Applause]*

*In the countries around them, The Hague delegates see other hopeful signs for a united Europe: the five-power alliance signed at Brussels last month, above all, the economic cooperation created by the Marshall Plan nations. As France's ex-Socialist Premier, Ramadier, addresses the conference, it becomes clear that this movement is one that transcends all parties and all frontiers.*

*[Brief part of Ramadier speaking]*

*In this medieval hall of knights, Belgium's ex-Premier, van Zeeland, addresses the delegates. As he speaks, the plan for the continent's federation becomes brighter.*

*[Brief part of van Zeeland speaking]*

*Calling a Europe desperately seeking a sign of hope amid a mass of war talk, Winston Churchill says:*

*"It is not a movement of parties, but a movement of people. It must be all for all. Europe can only be united by the heartfelt wish and vehement expression of the great majority of all the peoples, in all the parties, in all the freedom-loving countries, no matter where they dwell or how they vote. We cannot aim at anything less than the union of Europe as a whole, and we look forward with confidence to the day when that union will be achieved."*

*[Applause]*

So, there is no doubt that Churchill favoured a united Europe. The key question is whether Churchill believed that Britain should be part of it.

Now, in his Zurich speech, Churchill said that Britain must be among the friends and sponsors of the new Europe, the implication being that she should not be part of it. But, in the statement of aims which, in 1946, he drafted for the United Europe Movement, he envisaged what he called "an effective European Union, uniting all Europe, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea", and he said, if the countries of Western Europe would make a start on their own, other states would join later as and when they can. He also said things that implied that Britain should be part, in fact, of a supranational Europe.

In London, in May 1947, just a few months after his Zurich speech, Churchill spoke of the idea of a united Europe "...in which our country will play a decisive part". He said that Britain and France should be the founder partners in this movement, and that if Europe united "...as to be a living force, Britain will have to play her full part as a member of the European family." Two years later, he quoted the French Foreign Minister, who'd said, "Without Britain, there can be no Europe." He said: "Our friends on the Continent need have no misgivings: Britain is an integral part of Europe, and we mean to play our part in the revival of her prosperity and greatness." He said: "No time must be lost in discussing the question with the dominions and seeking to convince them that their interests, as well as ours, lie in a united Europe." In opposition, though not in office, he advocated that Britain join the European Coal & Steel Community, which was the precursor of the European Union. And I think, just as his social policies would have got him expelled from the Labour Party, so I think his European policies

would get him expelled from the modern Conservative Party. However, it's fair to say that, in Government, he did very little to support these aims, so that, by the time his premiership ended in 1955, Britain was in the position it was long to occupy, of being outside the mainstream of European development.

I think part of the reason for this is Churchill's attachment to Empire. One has to remember that he grew up in the Victorian age, when the Empire covered around a fifth of the world's surface. True, by 1951, the Empire was coming to be transformed into a Commonwealth, but Churchill perhaps was slow to appreciate fully the importance of this, and continued to believe that, even though the Empire was in the process of becoming a Commonwealth, the independent members of the Commonwealth would continue to look to Britain for leadership and this would make Britain remain a great power.

He also believed very strongly in the Special Relationship with the United States, and as we saw from the first speech, he believed, probably rightly, that a strong alliance between Britain and America could have prevented the Second World War, and he also believed that such an alliance was the key to preventing confrontation with Soviet Russia. But Britain, he thought, because of her Empire, needn't be a junior partner in that alliance. "Britain," he said, "cannot be thought of as a single state in isolation. She is the founder and centre of a worldwide Empire and Commonwealth."

And his worry about involvement in Europe was it would weaken the Commonwealth, or, as he always preferred to call it, the Empire. When Britain first applied, unsuccessfully as it turned out, for membership of the European Community in 1961, Churchill very uncharacteristically could not make up his mind whether to support it or not, and he wrote I think what one has to call a fence-sitting letter to the chair of his constituency party. He said: "We have another role which we cannot abdicate, that of leader of the British Commonwealth. In my conception of a united Europe, I never contemplated the diminution of the Commonwealth. This application for membership is the sole way in which, so to speak, a reconnaissance can be carried out to find out for certain whether terms for British membership of the Community could be agreed which would meet our special needs as well as those of the Commonwealth and our partners in the European free trade area. To sum up my views," Churchill concluded, "I would say this: I think that the Government are right to apply to join the European Community, not because I am yet convinced that we shall be able to join, but because there appears to be no other way by which we can find out exactly whether the conditions of membership are acceptable." So, he really could not make up his mind.

But, after de Gaulle's veto, Churchill drafted a letter to the Belgium statesman, Paul-Henri Spaak, one of the founders of the European Community. In the end, he didn't send it, but what he said in the letter was: "The future of Europe if Britain were to be excluded is bleak indeed."

The key question I think is: what would Churchill's attitude have been when he came to realise the Special Relationship could not be a relationship of equals, and that the Commonwealth, whatever its value, could not be a substitute for Empire because it was not a power grouping?

One of Churchill's junior colleagues in his peacetime Government, who was a whip, Edward Heath, who of course, as Prime Minister, led Britain's successful application to join the Community in 1973, said that Churchill's hostility to Britain's involvement in the early-1950s was a matter not of principle but of circumstance, and that had Churchill appreciated that Britain would not remain an imperial or a world power, he would, like de Gaulle in France, have perceived that the country's future lay with Europe. Churchill wanted Britain to remain a power in the world. After the War, he lamented, "It is no good being wise and benevolent if no one listens to you and if you are not in a position to enforce your will."

Now, I personally agree with Heath's view: I think Churchill would have favoured Britain's membership of the European Union, but of course that is speculative, and the opposite view is perfectly tenable. What I think is not in doubt is that he did believe in European unity, in the idea of the European Union.

Now, in 1951, the Conservatives, under Churchill, were returned to power, and the Labour Party believed that the Conservatives would not be in power for long because they thought a Churchill Government would not be able or willing to maintain the gains of the Labour era, in particular full employment, the welfare state, and the

National Health Service, and they thought that Churchill would be a warmongering Prime Minister. A rather distasteful headline in the Daily Mirror shortly before the 1951 Election was "Whose finger on the trigger?" implying that Churchill could not be trusted to keep the peace. In fact, the Churchill Government did precisely the opposite to what the Labour Party had predicted. Far from being a warmonger, Churchill devoted his last years in office to trying to secure a summit conference with the Soviet Union so as to achieve détente in Europe, and his Government not only preserved, but extended, the welfare state inherited from Labour, and maintained full employment.

The caricature of Churchill as a warmongering reactionary is the opposite of the truth, and those who saw it in this way were quite blind to Churchill's past record, and in particular his record before 1914, when, as we have seen, he had been instrumental in helping to create the welfare state. It was unlikely that he would now dismantle what he had helped create.

Far from being a warmonger, Churchill hoped to achieve a summit conference with the Soviet Union. He was indeed the first to coin the term "summit" in an election speech in 1950, and a week before the 1951 Election, he said, "If I remain in public life at this juncture, it is because, rightly or wrongly, but sincerely, I believe I may be able to make an important contribution to the prevention of a Third World War and to bring in nearer the lasting peace settlement which the masses of the people of every race and in every land so fervently desire." He renewed the call for a summit after the death of Stalin in 1953, when he saw a chink of light in the Soviet monolith of which the West could take advantage. He believed development of the H-bomb, with its powerful destructive consequences, made a summit even more urgent. What he wanted was to re-negotiate the division of Europe.

He appreciated the Russian need for security, but he hoped that this need not entail rigid Soviet control over the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Perhaps countries like Poland and Czechoslovakia could achieve the same status as Finland: neutral, so no military threat to the Soviet Union, but with a democratic structure. But the call for a summit fell on deaf ears. Churchill was opposed not only by the Americans but by his own Cabinet and by senior diplomats in the Foreign Office, but one wonders whether they were wholly able to suppress the thought that they had all opposed him once before, when he had been right and they had been wrong, and we now know, from the Soviet archives, that Churchill's intuition served him as well as it had done when he warned about Hitler, that there was indeed a window of opportunity after Stalin's death, when the Soviet leaders were prepared to consider withdrawing Soviet troops from East Germany if a united Germany would remain neutral, and that might have begun a process of disengagement in Central Europe, a limited détente, which would have had beneficial consequences for the internal politics of the Soviet Union and might well have stimulated a relaxation of the dictatorship.

Now, after his retirement, Churchill's successor, Anthony Eden, who had been opposed to a summit while Churchill was Prime Minister, reversed his position, but it was too late because, by 1955, Khrushchev, who, at that stage, was a hard-line leader, was in power and the lines dividing Europe were coming to be frozen, and it would take the collapse of Communism and the Soviet Union to unfreeze them. But Churchill was the prophet of détente in Europe.

Now, he is often said to have been too old and too ill to have been an effective peacetime Prime Minister. Roy Jenkins, in his biography of Churchill, declares him "gloriously unfit for office" in 1951. It is true that Churchill was no better as an executive or an administrator than he had been during the War, but he did not see the role of Prime Minister as that of a Chairman of the Board or a micro-manager of the administration, but a pulpit from which he could give expression to the wishes of the British people. In 1940, he had detected and expressed the underlying attitude of the British people that they were not going to give in to Hitler. In 1951 too, he detected the underlying attitude of the British, that they did not want to undo the legislation of the Labour Government - what they wanted was a period of peace and quiet and consolidation after the reforms and upheavals of the Attlee years. "We meet together here," Churchill told the newly elected House of Commons in 1951, "with an apparent gulf between us, as great as I have known in 50 years of House of Commons life. What the nation needs is several years of quiet, steady administration, if only to allow socialist legislation to reach its full fruition." That was what Churchill offered. Both in 1940 and 1955, Churchill gave a sense of direction to the country. Churchill, who had often in peacetime been a divisive figure, became, from 1949 to 1955, a man of consensus.

In the election campaign in 1951, he had appealed for "...a time when this loud clatter and turmoil of party strife dies down for a spell and gives us a good, long, steady period in which the opposing parties may be able to see

some of each other's virtues instead of harping on each other faults." One cannot imagine any Prime Minister saying that today. But that was what he provided, and by 1955, the country was far more united and contented than it had been in 1951. Indeed, Churchill probably left behind a more united country than any other peacetime Prime Minister since the War, and that can be judged in terms of popular approval, that his Government is the only one since the War which, after a full term, increased its percentage of the vote, that the Conservatives in 1955 had 1.5% more of the vote than in 1951. Harold Wilson did the same after two short Parliaments, which I think does not count, and Margaret Thatcher increased the number of seats she won, her majority, in 1983, but on a smaller percentage of the vote because the opposition to her was divided. But Churchill's Government is the only one which was more popular at the end than it was at the beginning, so it seems to me the Churchill Government can claim to be one of the more successful Governments since the War, and arguably the most successful Conservative Government since the War.

So, even if we ignore 1940, Churchill's legacy is prodigious: as one of the founders of the welfare state, a great War leader, a supporter of European unity, a prophet of détente, and a leader of what was arguably the most successful Conservative Government of the post-War years. But of course, one cannot ignore 1940, a special year in British history, when Britain and the Commonwealth were the only countries still resisting Hitler, and only when the War Cabinet papers were released was it appreciated by how narrow a margin Britain had survived in 1940.

This is obscured by Churchill's War Memoirs because, writing about 1940, unusually for a politician, he toned down controversial matters where he had been right and his opponents wrong. He said: "Future generations may deem it noteworthy that the supreme question of whether we should fight on alone never found a place on the War Cabinet agenda. We were much too busy to waste time upon such unreal academic issues." Now, although that's formally true, it was not on the War Cabinet agenda, we now know that the War Cabinet held five crucial meetings during three days in May, at the end of May 1940, to discuss that very matter, and of the five members of the War Cabinet, Lord Halifax, the Foreign Secretary, favoured an approach to Mussolini to consider what terms might be available and considered resigning in protest at what he thought was Churchill's obstinacy; Neville Chamberlain, the former Prime Minister, waived but finally came down on Churchill's side; while the two Labour Members of the War Cabinet supported Churchill.

Churchill was equally generous to the British people. On his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, he insisted that it was the nation and the race dwelling around the world that had the lion's heart. "I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar," though he then added, "I also hope that I sometimes suggested to the lion the right places to use his claws." But he always insisted that it was the country that was determined to resist Hitler and that he was but the expression of that wish. Perhaps that was too generous and underestimates the importance of his inspiring leadership – we shall never know.

Attlee's verdict was: "Without Churchill, Britain might have been defeated. I do not say we would have been defeated, but we might have been. The absence of anybody of his quality was so blatant that one cannot imagine what would have happened if he had not been there." That seems to me a fair verdict.

Churchill and his rhetoric seem very remote from us today, and his concerns seem remote from our own, but he remains at the heart of the debate about Europe and the question about our relationship with the Continent, which has perhaps been one of the main dividing lines in British politics since 1945.

But I think he is relevant in an even deeper sense because I think 1940 has had a permanent effect on our psychology, an effect which paradoxically has distanced us from the Continent. To put it very crudely, 1940 means that, unlike our neighbours on the Continent, we do not have to be ashamed of what our grandparents might or might not have done 70 years ago, because we alone, amongst the large states of Europe, suffered neither fascism nor enemy occupation. On the Continent, states felt impelled to create a new form of political organisation after the War to overcome the traumas of the past – the European Union. We felt no such impulsion. On the contrary, the War gave us renewed confidence that we could flourish separate from the Continent. It is a paradox that the developments for which Churchill, the great European, was more than anyone responsible, tended to turn Britain away from the Continent. Churchill was, in my view, a European, but he reinforced attitudes which made it more difficult for Britain to play her part in the movement for European unity.

Now, some argue we are too fixated on 1940 and too hide-bound with the past. I do not agree. I think we can all take pride in what our grandparents did in ensuring that Europe did not fall under the permanent rule of perhaps the worst tyranny that it had ever known.

On July 14<sup>th</sup> 1940, Churchill said we were "...fighting by ourselves alone, but not for ourselves alone, because were Britain to fail," he said, "the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Ages, made more sinister and perhaps more protracted by the lights of perverted science." The truth is, in Britain, everybody today walks taller because of Churchill, and I think that is the fundamental reason why we should all pay him tribute on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.

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