

4.1.1 CHURCHILL, STALIN, & THE IRON CURTAIN BETWEEN THEM

WINSTON CHURCHILL'S FAMOUS "IRON CURTAIN" SPEECH

Below are excerpts from Winston Churchill's famous "Iron Curtain" speech and the response Joseph Stalin gave to it. After each speech is a series of questions for you to reflect upon:

On March 5, 1946 at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave his now-famous "Iron Curtain" speech to a crowd of 40,000, including US President Harry Truman. (Ryan, 1979). The following are excerpts from his speech:

"I have a strong admiration and regard for the valiant Russian people and for my wartime comrade, Marshal Stalin. There is deep sympathy and goodwill in Britain -- and I doubt not here [i.e. the United States] also -- towards the peoples of all the Russias and a resolve to persevere through many differences and rebuffs in establishing lasting friendships" (Churchill, 2003, p. 220).

"It is my duty however, [...] to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe. From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an **iron curtain** has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia; all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject, in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow" (Churchill, 2003, p. 420). "The safety of the world requires a unity in Europe, from which no nation should be permanently outcast. It is from the quarrels of the strong parent races in Europe that the world wars we have witnessed, or which occurred in former times, have sprung" (Churchill, 2003, p. 421).

"[...] in a great number of countries, far from the Russian frontiers and throughout the world, Communist fifth columns [i.e. groups working to bring communism to democratic countries] are established and work in complete unity and absolute obedience to the directions they receive from the Communist center [i.e. Moscow]. Except in the British Commonwealth and in the United States where Communism is in its infancy, the Communist parties or fifth columns constitute a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization" (Churchill, 2003, p. 422).

"[...] I repulse the idea that a new war is inevitable; still more that it is imminent. It is because I am sure that our fortunes are still in our own hands and that we hold the power to save the future, that I feel the duty to speak out now that I have the occasion and the opportunity to do so" (Churchill, 2003, p. 422).

"I do not believe that Soviet Russia desires war. What they desire is the fruits of war and the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines" (Churchill, 2003, p. 422).

"But what we have to consider here today while time remains, is the

permanent prevention of war and the establishment of conditions of freedom and democracy as rapidly as possible in all countries. Our difficulties and dangers will not be removed by closing our eyes to them. They will not be removed by mere waiting to see what happens; nor will they be removed by a policy of appeasement. What is needed is a settlement, and the longer this is delayed, the more difficult it will be and the greater our dangers will become" (Churchill, 2003, 422).

"From what I have seen of our Russian friends and allies during the war, I am convinced that there is nothing they admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for weakness, especially military weakness. [...] Last time I saw it all coming and cried aloud to my own fellow countrymen and to the world, but no one paid any attention. Up till the year 1933 or even 1935, Germany might have been saved from the awful fate which has overtaken her and we might all have been spared the miseries Hitler let loose upon mankind" (Churchill, 2003, p. 423).

"There never was a war in all history easier to prevent by timely action than the one which has just desolated such great areas of the globe. It could have been prevented in my belief without the firing of a single shot, and Germany might be powerful, prosperous and honored today; but no one would listen and one by one we were all sucked into the awful whirlpool. We surely must not let that happen again. This can only be achieved by reaching now, in 1946, a good understanding on all points with Russia under the general authority of the United Nations Organization and by the maintenance of that good understanding through many peaceful years, [...] supported by the whole strength of the English-speaking world and all its connections. [...] If the population of the English-speaking Commonwealths be added to that of the United States with all that such cooperation implies in the air, on the sea, all over the globe, and in science and in industry, and in moral force, there will be no quivering, precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure. On the contrary, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security" (Churchill, 2003, p. 423-424).

"If we adhere faithfully to the Charter of the United Nations and walk forward in sedate and sober strength, seeking no one's land or treasure, seeking to lay no arbitrary control upon the thoughts of men, if all British moral and material forces and convictions are joined with your own in fraternal association, the highroads of the future will be clear, not only for us but for all, not only for our time, but for a century to come" (Churchill, 2003, p. 424).

1. Who does Churchill mention at the start of his speech? Why do you think he does that?
2. Why would Churchill bring up the “unity of Europe” right after the paragraph about the “iron curtain”? What point is he trying to make?
3. Churchill doesn’t think the Russians want war – what does he think they want?
4. What does Churchill believe the Russians admire? What do the Russians not respect?
5. Why do you think Churchill brings up the subject of Germany in World War II in his speech?
6. What are the reasons Churchill wants the “English-speaking Commonwealth” – including the United States – to cooperate with one another?

Joseph Stalin responded to Churchill's speech in an interview with the leading newspaper of the former Soviet Union Pravda on March 14, 1946. The following are excerpts of his interview:

"[...] In substance, Mr. Churchill now stands in the position of a firebrand of war. And Mr. Churchill is not alone here. He has friends not only in England but also in the United States of America. In this respect, one is reminded remarkably of Hitler and his friends. Hitler began to set war loose by announcing his racial theory, declaring that only people speaking the German language represent a fully valuable nation. Mr. Churchill begins to set war loose also by a racial theory, maintaining that only nations speaking the English language are fully valuable nations, called upon to decide the destinies of the entire world. The German racial theory brought Hitler and his friends to the conclusion that the Germans, as the only fully valuable nation, must rule over other nations. The English racial theory brings Mr. Churchill and his friends to the conclusion that nations speaking the English language, being the only fully valuable nations, should rule over the remaining nations of the world" (Stalin, 1946). "As a result of the German invasion, the Soviet Union has irrevocably lost in battles with the Germans, and also during the German occupation and through the expulsion of Soviet citizens to German slave labor camps, about seven million people. In other words, the Soviet Union has lost in men several times more than Britain and the United States together" (Stalin, 1946).

"It may be that some quarters are trying to push into oblivion these sacrifices of the Soviet people which insured the liberation of Eu-

rope from the Hitlerite yoke" (Stalin, 1946).

"But the Soviet Union cannot forget them. One can ask therefore, what can be surprising in the fact that the Soviet Union, in a desire to ensure its security for the future, tries to achieve that these countries should have governments whose relations to the Soviet Union are loyal? How can one, without having lost one's reason, qualify these peaceful aspirations of the Soviet Union as "expansionist tendencies" of our Government" (Stalin, 1946)? "Mr. Churchill wanders around the truth when he speaks of the growth of the influence of the Communist parties in Eastern Europe.[...] The growth of the influence of communism cannot be considered accidental. It is a normal function. The influence of the Communists grew because during the hard years of the mastery of fascism in Europe, Communists showed themselves to be reliable, daring and self-sacrificing fighters against fascist regimes for the liberty of peoples" (Stalin, 1946).

"Mr. Churchill sometimes recalls in his speeches the common people from small houses, patting them on the shoulder in a lordly manner and pretending to be their friend. But these people are not so simpleminded as it might appear at first sight. Common people, too, have their opinions and their own politics. And they know how to stand up for themselves. It is they, millions of these common people, who voted Mr. Churchill and his party out in England, giving their votes to the Labor party. It is they, millions of these common people, who isolated reactionaries in Europe, collaborators with fascism, and gave preference to Left democratic parties" (Stalin, 1946).

1. To whom does Stalin compare Churchill and his "friends"? How does Stalin justify the comparison?
2. According to Stalin, what is it that the Soviet Union "cannot forget"? Why do you think Stalin feels that way?
3. Why does Stalin believe – in contrast to Churchill – that communism is spreading in Europe?
4. At the end of his speech, Stalin makes the point that "common people, too, have their opinions and their own politics. And they know how to stand up for themselves." Based on what Churchill said in his speech about the spread of communism, what do you think Stalin is trying to say here to contradict that?
5. Is there a middle ground between these two viewpoints? Find a quote from each speech to support your point of view.

Sources:

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