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The Oratory of Winston Churchill

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Winston Churchill has to be ranked as one of the great political orators, his wartime oratory regularly featuring in collections of the 'great speeches of history' and his style and rhetorical methods often used as the basis of 'how to' advice for budding speech-makers and business executives anxious to project the 'language of leadership' (Humes, 1991; Glover, 2011). He had a feel for words and great artistry in their use – 'he gets the last ounce out of the English language', it was once said (Hore-Belisha, 1953: 271) - but also worked extremely hard at his speechmaking (Humes, 1980; Weidhorn, 1987; Cannadine, 2002). Churchill was not a natural or spontaneous speaker but he made himself into a great orator – he studied the orators of the past and actually wrote about the subject – and always relied on detailed preparation, being dependent upon full and carefully worked-out scripts that even included stage directions ('pause'). Though he developed skills in repartee, his limited powers of improvisation meant that his oratory could be rather inflexible and he could give the impression of speaking at his audience (particularly in Parliament) rather than properly debating. However, one of his great strengths as an orator was that 'he could speak in both an arcane, heroic style and a plain everyday style', being able to utilise both an ornate, sometimes even anachronistic, vocabulary and also strong, short and simple words and colourful images to make his points (Rubin, 2003: 46-54). And a key aspect of Churchill's oratory was the performance element: his physical presence, his 'richness of gesture', his sense of timing, his voice, and his manner of

delivery (Fairlie, 1953; Weidhorn, 1987: 23-6). The written words alone were not enough, it has been suggested: 'Churchill's speeches, even if delivered verbatim by someone else, couldn't have had the same effect on audiences' (Montalbo, 1990: 13).

The length and intensity of Churchill's political career, however, poses a special challenge for the analysis of his oratory. He was an MP for over 60 years, changed parties twice, engaged with most of the big political issues and controversies of the time, and his collected speeches fill eight fat volumes totalling nearly 9,000 pages and over four million words. During the Second World War, it was famously said, he mobilised the English language and sent it into battle. His showmanship, rhetoric and charisma projected and inspired confidence and determination. That was the period of his greatest and most successful oratory (Charteris-Black, 2011: 53) and some of his famous phrases from that period became part of the national vocabulary and the collective historical memory. This chapter, however, focuses just on Churchill as Conservative leader in opposition and then back in government as prime minister in the 1945-55 period, a critical period in defining the post-war trajectory of British conservatism. It deals mainly with his oratory on domestic and party issues rather than the grand themes of world affairs and foreign policy that have hitherto received more attention. The chapter shows that whereas as leader of the opposition his preferred approach was to mount thunderous, slashing and strongly worded attacks on the mistakes and failings of the Labour government, his tone on return to office as prime minister was more restrained and consensual. Analysis of his speeches and of how his oratory worked casts light on how Churchill accommodated to the changed political landscape after 1945, won back power again in 1951, and approached the problems of governing in the 1950s.

Oratory as leader of the opposition 1945-51

The Churchill speeches that are most remembered after 1945 are those he delivered on the international stage, warning about the 'Iron Curtain' and the Soviet threat, and calling for European unity. He often seemed more comfortable in, and better fitted for, the role of world statesman than for the hard grind of domestic politics and party leadership at home in the UK, as leader of the opposition, a role he discharged in a semi-detached and rather erratic fashion (Theakston, 2012). It is striking that between 1945 and 1947 he took part in none of the parliamentary debates over the Labour government's key nationalisation, social insurance or health service measures (Addison, 1992: 390). Policy rethinking and renewal in opposition after 1945 owed little, if anything, to Churchill and his speeches largely avoided policy detail and promises. His strength was in the making of powerful, fighting speeches that went down well on his own side at least, and he always liked a good House of Commons ding-dong argument, though some Tories felt that he was liable to go over the top (Ball, 1999: 494, 498, 517, 528, 530, 535; Catterall, 2003: 26, 36, 52; Nicolson, 1968: 114). Hoffman (1964: 222) put it well: 'A brilliantly delivered harangue of the Government's policy by Winston Churchill might have – and often did have – the desired effect on the Press Gallery, but within the narrower parliamentary context, the speech might be regarded, even by some of his own party, as a wild, unreasonable, and perhaps embarrassing display, whose only contribution was to unite a divided government party.' At times also Churchill's set piece parliamentary speeches could be too ponderous, lengthy and stylised to be effective. The more pedestrian Attlee –

dry, astringent, precise, unemotional, matter-of-fact – could sometimes cut him down to size and score tactical debating victories.

Churchill's speech in parliament in September 1949 on the devaluation of the pound was one of his most effective in this period and illustrates well the political themes he developed as opposition leader and his style of argumentation (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7844-57). Conservative MP and diarist 'Chips' Channon actually considered it 'one of his very greatest speeches . . . to a crowded and anxious house . . . a stupendous performance, highly audible, polished, unanswerable, and damning. He held the House entranced for over an hour . . . the speech was . . . a clarion call to rally the nation' (Rhodes James, 1967: 535). Churchill ranged across arguments based on 'the brutal fact[s]' and rival political ideologies (*logos*), more populist and emotive appeals (*pathos*), and denigration of his opponents' motives and trustworthiness and reminders of his own character and record (*ethos*). Describing devaluation as 'a serious disaster', he attacked the government's 'mismanagement' of the country's finances 'in the these last four lavish years', a period of 'continued drift and slide downhill', with high public spending and crushing taxation burdening the public and stifling production and economic initiative. A mass of controls gave the government 'that power of interference on the daily life of the country which is a characteristic of Socialism.' There was 'prejudice against profit earners' and the government had 'thrust upon the nation . . . the evils of nationalisation', which was 'being proved every day more clearly to be a costly failure'. Cutting through the technicalities and statistics, Churchill vividly summed up the impact of devaluation:

It can only mean that we are forced to give much more of our life energy,

that is to say toil, sweat, physical fatigue, craftsmanship, ingenuity,

enterprise and good management, to buy the same quantity of

indispensable products outside this country as we had before. We have to

do more work and draw more upon our spirits and our carcasses to win

back the same amount of food, raw materials and other goods without

which we cannot carry on . . . The devaluation of the pound sterling draws

a further draft in life blood and . . . energy not only from the wage-earning

masses but from all that constitutes the productive fertility of Britain.

Stafford Cripps, had given Churchill a secret personal briefing before

devaluation had been announced, at which he had wept and complimented the Labour

Chancellor on his wisdom and bravery but said that, of course, he would have to make

political capital out of it (Addison, 1992: 402; Hennessy, 1992: 376). Indeed, in a

devastating personal attack on his opponent's integrity, Churchill 'went for the

jugular' (Bryant, 1997: 432), vehemently accusing Cripps of inconsistency,

incompetence and dishonesty. He went on to cite his own personal history of

involvement with the great Liberal social reforms before 1914, as Chancellor in the

1920s extending pensions, and as head of the wartime coalition which had planned for

many of the social services reforms enacted after 1945 to reject accusations that he

was 'callous about unemployment or the welfare of the people' and claim he had

actually shown 'services rendered to the working classes' greater than those that

could be claimed by his Labour opponents.

And throughout the his speech on devaluation Churchill was suggesting that

the government was playing 'the party game', was motivated by 'party spite',

'malice' and 'party doctrines' (referring to 'the fallacy of Socialism . . . which . . . can

only be enforced upon nations in its entirety in the wholesale fashion of

Communism'), whereas the Conservatives 'put country before party'. 'Personally', he said, 'I do not think that a large part of the British people are lower then vermin [a reference to an infamous remark by Aneurin Bevan]. I think that the British nation is good all through.' His argument was that the parties were far apart and that Labour was dividing the country with its 'extreme plans' and measures: 'there is a great gulf of thought and conviction between us' and there were 'more fundamental divergencies at every grade and in every part of our society than have been known in our lifetime.' It was, in all, a powerful, attacking and combative performance and 'a superb, rollicking electioneering speech, roaming freely . . . over the whole field of socialist iniquity', only a brilliant debating response from Bevan firing up Labour MPs and saving the day for a government that was on the back foot and reeling (Campbell, 1997: 208-9).

Once described as 'the greatest living British humorist' (Herbert, 1953: 295) and as possessing a 'devastating wit' (Shrapnel, 1978: 21), Churchill certainly understood the political uses of jokes and witticisms (Weidhorn, 1987: 81-106). When the new Minister for Fuel and Power, Hugh Gaitskell, advocated a policy of fewer baths to save on fuel, Churchill retorted that ministers had 'no need to wonder why they are getting increasingly into bad odour' and asked the Speaker if he would allow the word 'lousy' as a parliamentary expression, 'provided, of course, that it was not intended in a contemptuous sense but purely as one of factual narration' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7548). He offered mock sympathy to Herbert Morrison, faced by Labour rivals, in a parody of Tennyson: 'Crippses to the right of him, Daltons to the left of him, / Bevans behind him, volleyed and thundered . . . / What tho' the soldiers knew / Someone had blunder'd . . . / Then they came back, but not the four hundred' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7571). In the middle of a speech attacking the government for

squandering the nation's resources, a Labour MP shouted that he should sell his race horse (which was then having a winning streak), Churchill winning huge gales of laughter in the Commons by quickly firing back: 'I could sell him for a great deal more than I had bought him for but I am trying to rise above the profit motive' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7846; Herbert, 1953: 301). He gently mocked 'official Socialist jargon': 'You must not use the word "poor"; they are described as the "lower income group"', with 'houses and homes . . . in future to be called "accommodation units". I don't know how we are to sing our old song "Home Sweet Home". "Accommodation Unit, Sweet Accommodation Unit, there's no place like our Accommodation Unit"' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 7927). But the humour could have a vicious edge, as when he laid into Aneurin Bevan, an old enemy, after the latter's 'lower then vermin' outburst in 1948, saying that 'We speak of the Minister of Health, but ought we not rather to say the Minister of Disease, for is not morbid hatred a form of mental disease, moral disease, and indeed a highly infectious form? Indeed I can think of no better step to signalise the inauguration of the National Health Service than that a person who so obviously needs psychiatrical attention should be among the first of its patients' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7679). Whether used to charm, attack, deflate or divert, Churchill's humour was a key part of his persuasive armoury, representing a form of *pathos* (by stirring emotions to laughter) but also helping to bolster his *ethos* (by getting the audience on his side).

When speaking at public rallies and Conservative Party meetings, Tory MP Cuthbert Headlam thought Churchill 'always overstates his case – but our rank and file like this – from him at any rate' (Ball, 1999: 535). Ramsden (1995: 110) says the party had no other speaker to match him when it came to 'enliven[ing] the . . . party faithful.' At party conferences and rallies in this period he typically used three sorts of

ethos appeals. First, there were the allusions to his record of wartime leadership and opposition to appeasement in the 1930s: 'It may perhaps be that you give me some indulgence for leading you in some other matters which have not turned out so badly' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7254); 'Sometimes in the past I have not been wrong' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7386); 'I warned the nation before the war, and my advice was not taken. I warn them now . . . ' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7529). And references to the war – '1940 – that breathless moment in our existence' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7254) - arguably linked his personal leadership credibility with feelings of patriotism and collective historical memories (*pathos*). Second, he would refer to his long record as a minister in earlier governments (Liberal, Conservative and coalition administrations) to rebuff arguments that the Conservatives were not concerned about unemployment, social problems or welfare (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7389, 7530). And third, he signalled personal determination – to keep 'carrying the flag as long as I have the necessary strength and energy' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7387) – as a way of spurring on the party, with echoes of his wartime oratory when he insisted that the Conservatives would recover power provided they did not 'fail or falter or flag' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7255).

In terms of *pathos*-type appeals, Churchill would often appeal to patriotism and paint Labour as extreme 'sectarians' who had 'led our people so far astray' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7255). At a party gathering in November 1945 he framed the issue as:

> 'The People versus the Socialists.' On the one hand will be the spirit of
> our people . . . the ancient, glorious British people, who had carried our
> name so high and our arms so far in this formidable world. On the other

side will be the Socialist doctrinaires with all their pervasive propaganda,

with all their bitter class hatred, with all their love of tyrannising . . . with

all their hordes of officials and bureaucracy (Rhodes James. 1974a: 7260).

The division at the next election, he said in 1946, would be 'between those who

wholeheartedly sing "The Red Flag" and those who rejoice to sing "Land of Hope and

Glory"' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7390). This was pretty mild compared to the attacks

he sometimes made on 'this evil Socialist rule' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8000) and the

'totalitarian' tendencies he sometimes claimed to detect in the government's policies

and aims (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7531; Rhodes James, 1974b: 8002). At the 1949

party conference he cleverly used a wartime reference to paint Labour as divisive and

driven by party and class spite. Recalling 'the days of Dunkirk', he pointed that that

'We did not think then about party scores. We did not divide the men we rescued

from the beaches into those we cared about and those for whom, to quote a

Ministerial utterance, we did not care a tinker's curse. The rescuing ships that set out

from Britain did not regard a large part of the wearied and hard-pressed army we were

bringing back to safety, and as it proved in the end to victory – we did not regard

them as "lower than vermin"' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7863). Drawing sharp lines

between the parties in this way served to rally and fire up the Tory activists who, it is

said, simply 'idolised' him (Addison, 1992: 397).

Churchill would also speak to his party in terms of *logos*-type arguments,

claims and assertions though not usually getting bogged down with excessive detail.

There were nice swipes at 'the gloomy State vultures of nationalisation' hovering

above the country's industries, replacing the profit motive with 'the loss motive'

(Rhodes James, 1974a: 7256). Socialist regulations meant that ordinary people were

being 'harassed, harried, hampered, tied down and stifled' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7255). Reviewing the Labour government's failures on the housing front, he summed up by saying of socialism that 'in its revolt against the unequal sharing of blessings it glories in the equal sharing of miseries' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7311). Denouncing the government's 'ineptitude . . . inefficiency and . . . blunders' in 1946, he used *anaphora* to hammer home his points: 'Look around you. Look at the taxes. Look at the unbridled expenditure . . . Look at the queues . . . Look at the restrictions and repressions on every form of enterprise . . . Look at the ever-growing bureaucracy . . . look at Food . . . Look at the housing of the people . . . look at Coal' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7384).

Churchill framed his appeals to the electorate in his political broadcasts and election addresses using broadly similar rhetorical techniques and approaches. In terms of *ethos* he would sometimes allude to his war and pre-war record ('I have given you my warnings in the past, and they were not listened to'; 'We went through a lot in those days together. Let us make sure we do not throw away, by the follies of peace, what we have gained in the agonies of war'; 'One gets quite tired of saying things which are first mocked at and then adopted, sometimes, alas, too late' [Rhodes James, 1974a: 7192; 1974b: 7929, 8259]). At other times he stressed his social reform credentials ('I am the oldest living champion of [Social] Insurance in the House of Commons'; 'My friend Mr. Lloyd George'; 'We did not christen it [the welfare state] but it was our political child' [Rhodes James, 1974a: 7187; 1974b: 7926]). And in the 1951 general election, with Labour attempting to paint him as a threat to peace ('whose finger on the trigger?'), he argued that a Third World War was not inevitable and that 'the main reason I remain in public life is my hope to ward it off and prevent it' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8258).

At times, it must be said, his language could seem archaic – as in the reference to 'the cottage home to which the warrior will return' in a 1945 broadcast (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7174). On other occasions there were deliberate echoes of his wartime oratory, such as in his swipe at the Labour government in a 1949 speech: 'Never before in the history of human government has such great havoc been wrought by such small men' (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7832). And he remained verbally inventive, as in his description of the 'Socialist dream' in 1950 as 'no longer *Utopia* but *Queuetopia* (Rhodes James, 1974b: 7912) and his depiction of the Labour government's reliance on the big US loan – 'these large annual dollops of dollars from capitalist America': 'They seek the dollars; they beg the dollars; they bluster for the dollars; they gobble the dollars' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 7929-30). When Attlee complained that it was contradictory for Churchill to attack the government for both extravagance and austerity, he shot back: 'Has he never heard of having to pay a very high price for a very poor meal?' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 7954).

The 1945 election broadcast that backfired so damagingly because of the ill-judged smear about a Labour government needing to create 'some form of *Gestapo*' or 'political police' illustrates in other respects some characteristic Churchillian combinations of *logos* and *pathos* (Rhodes James, 1974a: 7169-74; Toye, 2010). Thus he argued against the Socialist view of the state as a threat to property, freedom, individualism and liberty: under socialism the 'formidable machine' of the state would be 'the arch-employer, the arch-planner, the arch-administrator and ruler, and the arch-caucus boss'. It would involve a vast bureaucracy of 'civil servants, no longer servants and no longer civil', interfering in every detail of ordinary life. These arguments were linked to patriotic sentiment, in that he depicted socialism as an alien 'continental conception' and declared that 'Here in old England, in Great Britain . . .

in this glorious Island, the cradle and citadel of free democracy throughout the world, we do not like to be regimented and ordered about and have every aspect of our lives prescribed for us.' And then, resorting to metaphor, as he had done so often in his wartime speeches (Charteris-Black, 2011: 52-78), he conceded that while socialist-style conditions may have been necessary in wartime 'to save our country', it was now time to 'quit the gloomy caverns of war and march out into the breezy fields, where the sun is shining and where all may walk joyfully in its warm and golden rays.'

In his 1950 election broadcasts he was still making highly aggressive attacks on socialism and 'the idea of an all-powerful State which owns everything, which plans everything, which distributes everything', and on the 'Socialist policy of equalising misery and organising scarcity' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 7904-5). But with a return to government finally within sight, in October 1951, he struck a different and more moderate note in his election broadcast. The country now needed, he said, 'a period of several years of solid stable administration by a Government not seeking to rub party dogma into everybody else.' The NHS and other postwar social reforms had been based on 'common policy. It was British policy, not party policy . . . four-fifths of the social legislation since the war was the agreed policy of all parties when I was Prime Minister with a large Conservative majority' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8254-5). He used a neat analogy to explain the difference between the Socialist and Conservative outlooks: 'We are for the ladder. Let all try their best to climb. They are for the queue. Let each wait in his place till his turn comes.' But there was reassurance for anyone who might slip off the ladder: 'We shall have a good net and the finest social ambulance service in the world' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8256).

Churchill's oratory as prime minister 1951-55

Churchill's oratory as prime minister after 1951 was in general much more consensual in tone and content than had been the case when he was fighting to regain office and taking up an adversarial stance as leader of the opposition. His unique personal prestige as a world statesman and his institutional status as prime minister meant that he had an automatic authority in the eyes of the audiences he was addressing. But he faced two particular challenges in terms of projecting and maintaining his credibility or *ethos*. The first was his great age (77 when he took office again, the oldest prime minister of the twentieth century), meaning that the issue of the succession and how long he could go on as prime minister was constantly in the minds of his colleagues, insiders and close observers. As Jenkins (2001: 846) put it: 'The major milestones in his political year were occasions when he would endeavour to show the Cabinet or the Americans, the Conservative Conference or the House of Commons, that he was fit to carry on. It was not so much what he said on these occasions, although he maintained his habit of meticulous preparation and sometimes produced speeches in which wit and vision were uniquely blended, as the fact that he was able to keep on his feet, and retain the resonance of his voice, long enough to say it at all.' Churchill, then, needed successful oratorical performances – he needed to 'put on a great show' as prime minister (Jenkins, 1994: 492) – to demonstrate that 'he still had the capacity and the will to govern' (Montague Browne, 1995: 177) and to stave off pressure for his retirement. Speeches that misfired could seriously damage his political capital and hasten the end of his leadership, his

misjudged and muddled speech in April 1954 in a bad-tempered and ineptly handled debate on the hydrogen bomb, and one with some highly partisan exchanges, being a case in point (Moran, 1968: 562-6; Gilbert, 1988: 965-70; Catterall, 2003: 304-5). The second challenge he faced was to overcome Labour's 'warmonger' campaign (which he felt had done him and the Conservatives 'great harm' and which he blamed for the slender majority of only seventeen seats in 1951 [Rhodes James, 1974b: 8289, 8317, 8412]). Hence Churchill's presentation of himself less as the great war-leader and more as a would-be international peacemaker, seeking a high-level summit meeting with the Americans and the Russians to try to defuse Cold War tensions and avert the horrors of a nuclear holocaust. Churchill's oratory on this issue was mostly framed in terms of *pathos* (appealing to emotions and values), backed up by *logos* (reasoning about the international situation), but also had an *ethos* dimension as he sought to define and communicate his political character and justify his continuation in office.

Speaking as prime minister in the House of Commons some of Churchill's oratory was based on *logos* or presentation of evidence to make his case: 'it is necessary to present the facts clearly to the nation in order that they may realise where we stand . . . I am only reciting facts' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8295). This might be the case in relation to setting out the government's inheritance and the situation it faced in terms of the balance of payments, the financial position, coal supplies, transport or housing when it came to power in order to show the scale of the problems faced and make claims about the progress the government had made. Similarly when speaking about foreign policy, defence and international issues, there would be a large element of evidence, information and reasoning in the presentation of the arguments and analysis. But, as Woodrow Wyatt (1958: 203) observed, 'if his speeches could not

avoid the use of many figures and technicalities there were always breaks in them designed to restore the attention of the House to a high pitch should it have grown a little bored.' For instance, 'to relieve the gloom of the [defence] manpower statistics', he threw in a joke about making a Latin quotation which he then proceeded to translate, for the benefit, he said, with a humorous and barbed thrust at the Labour intellectuals he always despised, 'of our Winchester friends'. In the same speech, in a nice piece of *antimetabole*, he linked two of the government's objectives: 'solvency is valueless without security, and security is impossible to achieve without solvency' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8459). He would use the same sort of trick to liven up otherwise routine party speeches: 'Bankruptcy banished by Butler' being a clever alliteration at a Conservative Women's meeting in 1954, for instance (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8570).

Arguably the main thrust of Churchill's parliamentary oratory was about projecting an *ethos* as a national leader, someone not simply trying to foster the interests of his party but to 'lead, inspire and unite his countrymen' (Seldon, 1981: 36). One of his main ways of doing this was by emphasising what united rather than divided the parties and the public. Thus in his first major speech to the House of Commons after being elected prime minister again he said:

> We meet together here with an apparent gulf between us as great as I have known in fifty 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. What the House needs is a period of tolerant and constructive debating on the merits of the questions before us without nearly every speech on either side being distorted by the passions

of one Election or the preparations for another . . . Controversy there must

be on some of the issues before us, but this will be a small part of the

work and interests we have in common.

If the nation continued 'deeply and painfully divided . . . split in half in class and

ideological strife', with the opposing parties 'more or less evenly balanced', with

closely-fought elections and narrow majorities, and an atmosphere of 'fierce, bitter,

exciting class and party war', the results would be deeply damaging to the country's

economic and international position (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8289-90).

     Churchill's speech in the House of Commons on 3 November 1953, during the

debate on the Address at the opening of the new session, provides an example of

persuasion through *pathos*, with an emphasis on shared values and identity and on

collective problems and challenges (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8497-8505). Although he

devoted a chunk of his speech to controversial policy subjects – touching on the

government's proposals for dealing with housing repairs, rents and landlords, and also

on plans for the system of agricultural marketing and subsidies after the end of food

rationing and controls – he struck a consensual and reasonable note, quoting from the

Scottish socialist politician and former wartime minister Tom Johnston to try and

suggest that housing be treated as a non-partisan issue. His general theme on the

domestic front was again to play down political divisions and conflict. 'It may

sometimes be necessary for governments to undo each other's work, but this should

be an exception and not the rule', he said in a key passage. 'We are, of course,

opposed, for instance, to nationalisation of industry . . . We abhor the fallacy, for such

it is, of nationalisation for nationalisation's sake. But where we are preserving it, as in

the coal mines, the railways, air traffic, gas and electricity, we have done and are

doing our utmost to make a success of it, even though this may somewhat mar the symmetry of party recrimination.' 'Having rows for the sake of having rows between politicians might be good from time to time', he ventured, 'but it is not a good habit of political life.' The country was not as divided as some tried to make out, he argued. Fourteen million people voted Tory and about another fourteen million voted Socialist: 'It is not really possible to assume that one of these fourteen million masses of voters possess all the virtues and the wisdom and the other lot are dupes or fools, or even knaves or crooks.' It seemed to him 'nonsense for party politicians to draw such harsh contrasts between them.' 'We have to help our respective parties, but we also have to make sure that we help our country and its people', he concluded, humorously ruling out the idea of a coalition, however, as that 'would be carrying good will too far.'

At times in the speech it seemed that he was, as Moran (1968: 520) put it, 'brooding on the future of the world' – what Churchill himself, with his usual verbal inventiveness, called this 'quivering, convulsive, and bewildered world'. There had been a row with Anthony Eden and the Foreign Office over the section where he wanted to talk about a possible change of policy and outlook in the post-Stalin Soviet Union and about his proposal for a heads of government summit meeting, and these remarks were accordingly toned down and heavily qualified (Moran, 1968: 515, 520-1). But the main rhetorical impact (again using *pathos*) came with Churchill's musings on the 'fearful scientific discoveries' involved in the development of the hydrogen bomb and the dangers of atomic warfare that 'cast their shadow on every thoughtful mind'. 'I have sometimes the odd thought', he said, 'that the annihilating character of these agencies may bring an utterly unforeseeable security to mankind. When I was a schoolboy I was not good at arithmetic, but I have heard it said that

certain mathematical quantities when they pass through infinity change their signs from plus to minus – or the other way round [*laughter*] . . . It may be that this rule may have a novel application and that when the advance of destructive weapons enables everyone to kill everybody else nobody will want to kill anyone at all.'

Churchill concluded the speech with a stirring and emotional passage in which he said that if nuclear weapons made another world war and 'the dread of mass destruction' perhaps now more remote, the resources set free offered the human race the alternative of 'the swiftest expansion of material well-being that has ever been within their reach, or even within their dreams. By material well-being I mean not only abundance but a degree of leisure for the masses such as has never before been possible in our mortal struggle for life . . . We, and all nations, stand at this hour in human history, before the portals of supreme catastrophe and of measureless reward. My faith is that in God's mercy we shall choose aright.'

Harold Macmillan thought that this was a 'really remarkable' speech and that Churchill had proved himself 'complete master of himself and of the House' (Catterall, 2003: 272). 'Chips' Channon believed Churchill had made 'one of the speeches of his lifetime. Brilliant, full of cunning and charm, of wit and thrusts, he poured out his Macaulay-like phrases to a stilled and awed house. It was an Olympian spectacle. A supreme performance which we shall never see again from him or anyone else' (Rhodes James, 1967: 479). The speech in fact 'went down well on all sides of the House' (Jenkins, 2001: 871), and afterwards Lord Moran talked to a Labour MP who was in tears, murmuring 'He is a very great man . . . The country needs him' (Moran, 1968: 521).

'We are one country', Churchill had declared in a speech at Harrow School in December 1951 (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8314), and this was also a dominant theme in

the prime-ministerial broadcasts he made to the public as prime minister. Some of his appeals in these broadcasts (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8314-18, 8368-72) were built around what he presented as 'what we found on taking over', the state of the national finances, the balance of payments and the reserves being sketched in to justify the need to 'put our house in order'. Although he cited facts and figures, he was quick to move into metaphor as a way of encapsulating the nations' problems. Thus the country was likened to a train running downhill at high speed on the wrong track: it could not be instantly stopped without the train being 'wrecked and the passengers mangled'; rather, the brakes had to be applied, the situation brought under control and then the engine put in reverse to get onto the right line – something which would take the government several years, so patience would be needed (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8315). Or the country was like a 'swimmer who cannot keep his head above water long enough to get a new breath' and 'we are swimming against the stream trying to keep level with a bush on the bank.' 'A truly national effort', he said, 'is needed to make headway', based on 'three or four years of steady, calm and resolute Government at home and abroad' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8370). He then appealed to a spirit of national unity: 'This is not the time for party brawling.' There had to be a halt to what had been two years (1950-51) of party divisions and electioneering: 'It can't go on if we are to go on'. The differences between the parties were no so great as observers might think who only listened 'to our abuse of one another', he insisted. 'There are underlying unities throughout the whole British nation. These unities are far greater than our differences . . . we all sink or swim together.' On domestic policy, the social services, foreign affairs and defence, he believed, 'nine-tenths of the British people agree on nine-tenths of what has been done and is being done and is going to go on being done.' These *pathos* appeals, with Churchill using the language of 'this

island' and 'our people', were reiterated with an allusion to wartime threats and unities - 'what we have to face now is a peril of a different kind to 1940' – serving to underline his character and credibility (or *ethos*) as a national and not just a party leader.

Churchill was a master of display or *epideictic* rhetoric, speaking to history and for the nation, as seen to brilliant effect in this period in his tributes on the death of King George VI in February 1952 in the House of Commons and in a broadcast (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8336-42). Jenkins (2001: 860) describes them as 'among his finest *éloges*' and 'Chips' Channon thought his Commons speech was 'sublime, so simple and eloquent with his Macaulay phrases pouring out. The attentive House was electrified' (Rhodes James, 1967: 564). In just 1700 words in parliament, Churchill evoked the continuities of British history, the central place of the monarchy in national life, the deaths of previous monarchs, the unity of the British Commonwealth and Empire, and the country's surmounting of the terrible challenges and threats of the twentieth century: 'we salute his memory because we all walked the stony, uphill road with him and he with us.' In his radio broadcast, his eulogy included a memorable and moving passage about how the king 'walked with death as if death were a companion, an acquaintance whom he recognized and did not fear. In the end death came as a friend.' Few political leaders could match Churchill's skill in this branch of oratory, based as it was on a deep sincerity of thought and feeling, and in a way being very revealing of his character and personality.

In Churchill's party conference speeches in this period the attacks on Labour were more humorous and mocking than venomous. In 1953, for instance, he explained how he had watched the Labour frontbench reaction to the government's budget:

From where I sat I had a fine view of the faces of our Socialist opponents

and could watch their expressions as the story was unfolded. It was quite

painful to see their looks of gloom and sorrow when any fact was stated

which was favourable to our country and its prospects They frowned and

scowled and hung their heads until I thought some of them were going to

break into tears. However, we are far from being out of the wood yet, and

when warnings were given by the Chancellor of the disappointments that

had occurred or dangers that lie ahead, it was wonderful to see how

quickly they cheered up. Their eyes twinkled, their faces were covered

with grins not only of mirth but of mockery. However, on the whole they

had a bad time and there was much more for them to bemoan and bewail

than for them to jibe and jeer at (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8468).

Conciliatory remarks would also be directed from the conference platform at the trade

unions, consistent with his political aim of getting on with them – rather than taking

them on. As Addison notes (1992: 412), 'they had supported rearmament,

collaborated in the war effort, and championed the Cold War. In Churchill's view

they formed a patriotic estate of the realm.' 'We owe a great deal to the trade unions',

he asserted in 1952 (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8417). 'I regard the trade unions as one of

the outstanding institutions of our country', he said a year later (Rhodes James,

1974b: 8466).

He would use *logos*-type arguments to make the point that 'Socialist

predictions' and 'prophecies' of what the results of a Conservative government would

be had been falsified (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8412-13, 8466). And he would trumpet

Conservative achievements: 'We let the traders trade and we let the builders build. Our aim has been freedom, not control. The ration book has gone down the drain with the identity card. Two-thirds of the wartime regulations we inherited have been scrapped . . . Form-filling has ceased to be our national pastime.' 'This year', he declared in 1954 in a neat piece of *epiphora* (end repetition), 'our countrymen and women ate more, earned more, spent more, saved more than has every happened before in all our records' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8594). 'The facts cannot be challenged', he asserted, saying the government should be 'judged . . . by results' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8593). He would not deny the 'immense doctrinal differences' between Conservatives and 'Socialists', and the 'rivalry and partisanship' between the parties. But, as in his parliamentary speeches and public broadcasts, so in his party speeches at this time he would often try to speak as a national leader and rally his followers through appeals to consensual values and interests. There was a need for 'a definite period of stability, confidence, and recuperation [to] be granted to this overburdened island after all she has done for others and all we have gone through ourselves' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8469). Rather than 'class hatred or doctrinal pedantry', the country 'stand[s] in need of a breathing space. This is not a time for violent ideological conventions.' The political parties and the masses of voters lined up behind them 'have a great deal in common' (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8595).

It is worth looking in some detail at one of Churchill's Conservative Party Conference speeches in particular - the one he delivered at Margate on 10 October 1953 - because there was a huge amount at stake and it was one of the most crucial speeches of his second premiership. This was because it was a test of whether he would be able to continue as prime minister following the stroke that had almost killed him three months earlier. That had been concealed from the media and the

public but rumours about his illness had been swirling around the party, and the succession question had been preoccupying senior ministers, most of whom wanted him to quit (Seldon, 1981: 44). Was the nearly 79-years old Churchill finished or was he fit to go on? 'Never before', Churchill admitted, 'has so much depended on a single bloody speech' (Moran, 1968: 503). He had not spoken in public for five months ('the first time in my political life that I have kept quiet for so long', he quipped [Rhodes James, 1974b: 8496]), and put considerable effort into working on and preparing for the ordeal. He practised his speech in front of a looking-glass, had a full dress-rehearsal to see if he could actually stand for 50 minutes (the idea of delivering the speech while sitting on a high stool having been rejected), knocked back the usual Churchill-style 'very light luncheon' ('a dozen oysters, two mouthfuls of steak and half a glass of champagne'), had a throat spray administered by his throat surgeon, and then swallowed a special pep-pill given to him by his personal doctor, Lord Moran (Moran, 1968: 501-4) before setting forth.

One of Churchill's Cabinet ministers, Oliver Lyttelton, once noted how he often began 'and of course on purpose, with a few rather stumbling sentences; his audience was surprised that the phrases did not seem to run easily off his tongue. The tempo was slow and hesitant. Then gradually the Grand Swell and the Vox Humana were pulled out and the full glory of his words began to roll forth' (Chandos, 1962: 183). And indeed the Margate speech (Rhodes James, 1974b: 8489-97) started quietly and low-key, on a 'peripheral' subject (British Guiana) (Jenkins, 2001: 870). Churchill then set out to 'take stock of our position', as he put it, two years after taking office. There were eleven separate tributes to named Cabinet ministers, 'which, while fence-building and maybe well deserved', comments Jenkins (2001: 870), 'were not the stuff of which high oratory is made.' For a party conference speech, it

was 'relatively unpartisan. While he mentioned Attlee five times he did so with more respect than venom, and his jokes about the "Socialists" were good-humoured' (Jenkins, 2001: 870). Commiserations were offered to Labour's leader for 'having to put up with a lot of trouble', Labour's own conference being described as a 'confused and incoherent spectacle'. While Attlee was commended for his 'sensible statements on foreign policy', the 'Bevanite faction' was attacked for its 'irresponsible' attitude of 'carping and sneering at the United States and . . . hostility to the new Germany.' Swipes at 'the inherent fallacy of Socialism as a philosophy' and at Labour's 'class warfare' approach and its 'exploitation of jealousy and envy', with nationalisation described as a 'fallacy' and a 'failure' rather than as 'the Eldorado of the workingman', and as 'an utter flop', were designed to appeal to the Tory grass roots through evoking their collective dislike of their political opponents. Trade unions were described as playing 'an important part in our national life', however, Churchill praising their 'useful work' in 'restraining the featherheads, crackpots, vote-catchers, and office-seekers from putting the folly they talk into action.'

The use of *pathos* could also be seen in the identification of the Conservatives not with 'class interests' or 'faction' and 'party triumphs', but with serving the British people, 'the nation', and 'the world-wide Commonwealth and Empire'. Conservative policies, Churchill insisted, were 'sensible and practical'; 'we have tried very hard', he said, 'to make our administration loyal, sober, flexible, and thrifty'. He made it clear that he stood for 'the progressive Conservatism of Tory democracy'. Using a classic mix of the three-list (*tricolon*) and *anaphora* he declared: 'We stand for the free and flexible working of the laws of supply and demand. We stand for compassion and aid for those who, whether through age, illness, or misfortune, cannot keep pace with the march of society. We stand for the restoration of buying and selling between

individual importers and exporters in different countries…'. 'We are for private enterprise', he continued, 'with all its ingenuity, thrift, and contrivance'.

The speech was fairly light in terms of *logos*-type appeals to evidence of policy detail or achievement. 'Two years ago we were sliding into bankruptcy and now at least we may claim solvency', he said. The target of building 300,000 houses a year had been met. The steel and transport industries had been 'liberated just in time' (in other words, denationalised) but the coal industry and the railways had to remain nationalised. Food rationing was one of Churchill's main domestic concerns (Seldon, 1981: 210), and while meat was not finally derationed until July 1954 he took pride in the increasing consumption in a rather humorous part of the speech. 'I am always very chary about loading a speech with percentages' he began. 'I like the simplest forms of statement.' Mocking 'those professional intellectuals who revel in decimals and polysyllables', he declared that 'personally I like short words and vulgar fractions.' 'Here is the plain vulgar fact', he stated before going on to misquote the figures for meat consumption in the first two years of the Conservative government. Instead of 400,000, he said the public had eaten 4,000 tons more meat than under Labour (Moran, 1968: 506). When corrected by somebody at his side his response won more applause and laughter: 'How lucky it was that I did not complicate it with percentages. I will give you the figure again – I like the taste of it' (*The Times*, 1953a).

Over a quarter of the speech was devoted to foreign affairs and the world scene. Here the points were sometimes framed in terms of *pathos* – the need of 'getting through this awful period of anxiety without a world catastrophe' and 'finding a secure foundation for world peace', the way in which 'we have lived through half a century of the most terrible events which have ever ravaged the human

race', and the international dangers hanging 'so heavily on the daily lives of every one of us'. But he also put forward basic arguments about the facts of Western defence and NATO, and the necessity for the American alliance and a rearmed West Germany in the face of the Soviet threat. This shaded into an *ethos* appeal, based on his personal history: 'You must not mind my putting these things plainly to you because I have had a life of experience in the matter.' And he then used the speech to reiterate his personal policy of seeking a high-level summit meeting to tackle Cold War tensions - 'let us not try to see whether there is not something better for us than tearing and blasting each other to pieces, which we can certainly do' – though he did not disguise that the Americans were doubtful about this idea.

All this was inevitably tied up with Churchill's own political future. He used the speech to say there would be no general election that year or next. His remarks that 'We have to do our duty . . . We have to do our work, our job. We have to do it or try to do it with all our lives and strength' could be interpreted as a signal that he was intending to remain at the helm for some time yet (*The Times*, 1953a). His peroration was 'quietly phrased' (Jenkins, 2001: 870) but used to suggest he was staying in politics because he felt he could play a part and had big things to do on the world stage: 'If I stay on for the time being bearing the burden at my age it is not because of love for power or office. I have had an ample share of both. If I stay it is because I have a feeling that I may through things that have happened have an influence on what I care about above all else, the building of a sure and lasting peace.'

The speech was widely seen as a triumph: 'a tribute not only to his powers of recovery, but to his determination to continue in office' (Gilbert, 1988: 895). To his audience 'he seemed (as he was) an old man, but a very brilliant and commanding old man' (Grigg, 1977: 12). 'The old fighter and sage was back', noted *The Times*

(1953b), with his characteristic 'flashes of wit, the love of the resounding phrase, the zest for the party tussle'. 'The way he speaks, his little tricks and mannerisms, bring back to them the war and all they owe to him', Moran (1968: 507) commented about the reaction of the Tory party faithful. Harold Macmillan called it a 'magnificent' performance 'in the best Churchillian vein. The asides and impromptus were as good as ever' (Catterall, 2003: 269). At one point, Churchill paused to take a sip from a glass of water that was passed to him. There were roars of laughter as he chuckled and said, 'I don't often do that . . . when making a speech' (*The Times*, 1953a). Followed up by an equally commanding performance in the House of Commons three weeks later, Churchill had succeeded in asserting his authority and his command of the party, holding on to the premiership for another year and a half, and seeing off those who were longing for him to step down.

Conclusion

Of Churchill's great wartime speeches it has been said that 'He succeeded because he combined the rules of rhetorical style, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, with an historian's sense of historical moment, and because he employed *topoi* from the storehouse of English history and drama that had such a deep hold on the English psyche that they were almost guaranteed to create the desired response from the audience' (Glover, 2011: 74). He set the oratorical standards or the benchmark against which the rhetoric of subsequent leaders in crisis situations is measured (Charteris-Black, 2011: 52).

After 1945 he had to deploy his oratory in a different context and for different purposes. The verdicts on Churchill's post-war oratory are mixed. His parliamentary

speeches as leader of the opposition were often not highly rated by either side (Rhodes James, 1993: 515). While they could be entertaining, they could also be vituperative, vague and not always convincing (Cannadine, 2002: 108). To some extent it was 'good clean political chaff' and hyperbole of the sort of he had had thrown at him in the past, and that he had thrown himself: 'Though he may really believe that Britain is going down the drain and that the Socialists are handmaidens of the devil, he is half of the time winking at us and joining us in admiration of his wit and rhetoric' (Weidhorn, 1974: 180). His opposition rhetoric may have distracted attention away from the point that he actually led the Conservative Party from a centre ground position, something that became more obvious back in office again after 1951.

As prime minister again 1951-55, 'of necessity his rhetoric was less inspirational and more emollient' than it had been during the war and it is said that 'the words no longer flowed as easily or majestically as they once had' (Cannadine, 2002: 109). However, he could draw on all the 'artfulness and artifice' honed over a lifetime of public speaking (Chandos, 1962: 183) and, at his best, the old maestro's performances could still impress his different audiences, other politicians and close observers (Fairlie, 1953; Wyatt, 1958: 194-215). Whatever his other limitations and failings as prime minister for the second time in the 1950s, Churchill remained capable of formidable oratory and stylised public performance pretty much until the final curtain.

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