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**To What Extent was Churchill's Success in Times of War the Reason he Was Defeated in
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On July 26, 1945, Churchill's defeat in the election of 1945 was announced. [1] This certainly came as a surprise to Churchill and to the rest of the world as it was not long before that date that the people had praised Churchill's heroism. The *New York Times* commented, calling the outcome of the election, "*one of the most stunning electoral surprises in the history of democracy.*" [2] How then, did the defeat come about, and what caused it? To what extent was Churchill's success in times of war the reason he was defeated in the 1945 election?

To fully analyze Churchill's wartime success, one must first analyze his rise to power. Before Winston Churchill was in office, Neville Chamberlain had been serving as Prime Minister of England. On May 8, 1940, Chamberlain asked the Labor Party to join him in an all-party coalition government. However, the people of England were starting to have doubts about his leadership. [3] When France came under attack of Nazi Germany on May 10, 1940, Chamberlain realized that his policy of appeasement was not working and that action needed to be taken. [4] Chamberlain formally lost the confidence vote of the House of Commons, for the members also realized that appeasement was not working. So, on the same day as the first Nazi attack on France, Chamberlain announced his resignation. [5] It had previously been decided that no general elections would be held until after the war. As a result, the members of Parliament who were currently in office stayed in office and went far past the usual five-year term, as the next election would not happen until 1945. [6] Because there were not going to be any elections held, King George VI had to ask someone to take over the role of Prime Minister. The king decided that Winston Churchill was the man for the elite responsibility. That same day as the

Nazi attack, May 10th, Churchill became Prime Minister of England. [7] Churchill had in mind the same strategy as Chamberlain: a coalition government made up of the leaders of the main political parties. [8]

As Churchill's own political party association had been marked with much vacillation, switching from the Conservative party to the Liberal party, and later becoming an independent before rejoining the Conservative party in 1925, it is understandable why he would want a coalition government, as his own political opinions were distinctly eclectic. A coalition government would ensure the expression of opinions from all sides of the political spectrum. During the war, the country needed as many opinions as it could get to ensure that wise and proper decisions would be made. In Churchill's opinion, a coalition government would be the only moral choice to defend the country in the time of war. [9]

First off, Churchill made himself the Minister of Defense. In this role, he would control the British war effort through administrative and diplomatic means. [10] He took over this role to ensure himself the ability to manage the Chiefs of Staff all throughout the war. [11] After only having been in office for three days, Churchill revealed his new war cabinet, a group he chose regardless of party affiliation for their great energy and talent. [12] Clement Atlee, who was the leader of the Labor party, would be particularly very influential as he was appointed Churchill's Deputy Prime Minister. [13]

Before investigating the reasons Churchill lost in the 1945 election, it is necessary to analyze the events and Churchill's success in the time leading up to the election. Churchill's tremendous success as a leader was marked by his outstanding ability to inspire people. On March 13th, in his third day in office, Churchill gave the first of his many famous speeches as Prime Minister, "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat," to the House of Commons to inspire the British to keep fighting although the enemy seemed impossible to defeat. [14]

"You ask, what is our policy? I say it is to wage war by land, sea, and air. War with all our might and with all the strength God has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word. It is victory. Victory at all costs - Victory in spite of all terrors - Victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival. Let that be realized. No survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge, the impulse of the ages, that mankind shall move forward toward his goal. I take up my task in buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. I feel entitled at this juncture, at this time, to claim the aid of all and to say, "Come then, let us go forward together with our united strength." [15]

He then encouraged those around him, specifically the United States and the Soviet Union, to join the British in preparing for war. The eventual securing of these Allies allowed Churchill to not only save England but also the rest of Europe. [16]

One of Churchill's private secretaries had said about him,

"The effects of Churchill's zeal were felt immediately in Whitehall. Government departments which under Neville Chamberlain had continued to work at much the same

speed as in peacetime awoke to the realities of war. A sense of urgency was created in the course of very few days and respectable civil servants were actually to be seen running along the corridors. No delays were condoned; telephone switchboards quadrupled their efficiency; the Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Planning Staff were in almost constant session; regular office hours ceased to exist and weekends disappeared with them.” [17]

In addition, he was regarded as a hero for his strong leadership during World War II. He chose to stay in London, even during the German Blitz, and made a habit of visiting areas damaged by the Luftwaffe bombing. He could have easily fled from the dangers of the German bombing, yet, he refused to leave his people behind. [18]

Along with this, as Minister of Defense, he was in charge of every single British decision made during the war. During the year of 1940, Britain had worked hard to fight with the French against Hitler and the Nazis. However, when the French asked for more Royal Air Force squadrons, Churchill replied saying that there were not enough to defend both Britain and France: *“[the German Luftwaffe could attack] the most dangerous targets of all, the factories producing new aircraft. It was impossible to run further risks [by lending British squadrons]. [19]* Later the prime minister also said, *“This is **not** the decisive point. This is not the decisive moment. The decisive moment will come when Hitler hurls his Luftwaffe against Britain. If we can keep command of our own island—that is all I ask—we will win it all back for you [France].” [20]* Although it was a tough decision not to aid his ally, Churchill knew that the decision had to be made or Britain could have been defeated by Germany and the Allies would have certainly lost the war.

The French were ultimately forced to surrender to Germany on June 22, 1940. When this happened, Britain was in a daze. The people of Britain began to realize how serious the war was and how much of a struggle it would be. An American observer described the tone of England perfectly saying, “*At places where normally there is a noisy bustle of comings and goings the same extraordinary silence.*” [21] It was reported that François Darlan, the Commander in Chief of the French Navy, was doing all that he could to avert the Nazis from gaining control of his ships. In the armistice signed between France and Germany, which was done without any consultation of Britain on France’s part, Article VIII stated, “*the French war fleet . . . will be assembled in ports to be specified and then demobilized and disarmed under German or Italian control.*” [22] Upon Hitler’s declaration that the French ships would not be used for their war effort, Churchill replied, “*What is the value of that? Ask half a dozen countries, what is the value of such solemn assurance? Furthermore, the armistice could be voided at any time on any pretext of ‘non-observance.’*” [23] On June 25, George Bernard Shaw introduced the idea of declaring war on France and seizing her fleet. Though the Vichy Regime of France would not be too thrilled with this operation, Churchill decided that it was necessary. He realized that the Vichy Regime would have become frustrated regardless due to Britain’s blockade of Vichy. Thus, on July 3, what was later given the name “Operation Grasp” was successfully carried out. [24] It was a tough decision to decide to go against former allies but Churchill knew that Hitler could not be trusted and could not allow him to gain another advantage if Churchill intended to defeat Germany. As the year of 1940 came to a conclusion, Churchill had successfully resisted Hitler but had not yet defeated him. Britain continued fighting into 1941 though she had no allies to help her. [25]

Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June of 1941. The Soviet Union then joined the Allies so they could receive help to ward off the German invasion. [26] Shortly afterward, Churchill gave another speech, one which had the goal of challenging not just his listeners' intellect but also their imaginations. [27] He stated that Britain would fight by all means until it had "*rid the earth of his [Hitler's] shadow and liberated its peoples from his yoke.*" [28] In December, the winter worked in the Soviets' favor and they successfully drove the Germans from Moscow on the 6th. [29]

Churchill greatly desired to have the United States as an ally. He had spent almost two years doing everything he could to try to convince Roosevelt to join to British offensive. As 1941 was ending, Churchill did not have much reason to believe that the United States would enter the war before 1942. [30] However, the United States decided to join the Allies by declaring war on Japan on December 8th, the day after Pearl Harbor had been bombed. [31] Germany felt obliged to back up their ally, Japan, and declared war on the United States on December 11th. This brought the United States to the war in Europe. [32]

After Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union had been through much fighting against Hitler and the Axis powers, Victory in Europe Day, or VE day, the day that marked the end of the war in Europe, finally came on May 8, 1945. [33] Churchill announced to the people of England, "*The evil-doers now lie prostrate before us.*" [34] Churchill very much contributed to the Allied victory with his heroism, inspiring speeches, proactiveness to obtain allies, and his wise military decisions.

Now that Churchill's rise to power and successes during the war have been analyzed, the reasons for his defeat may be explored. Churchill had been certain he would win the election due to his wartime success. As a result, he did not put much effort into his campaign. Only 3,000 pounds sterling was spent on campaigning. In comparison to the amount spent on Chamberlain's Conservative campaign in 1935, it was barely a tenth of Chamberlain's expenditures. [35] After the war, however, Japan was still an issue and only five days after VE Day Churchill announced his ambitions of defeating Japan to the public, *"I told you hard things at the beginning of these last five years; you do not shrink, and I should be unworthy of your confidence and generosity if I did not still cry: Forward, unflinching, unswerving, indomitable, till the whole task is done and the whole world is safe and clean."* [36] Churchill wanted to continue the wartime coalition as he planned on continuing to fight until Japan was defeated. However, Churchill's Labor ministers wanted to let the country decide for itself because they felt that it could take several years to defeat Japan. They decided that it was not fair to the people, nor was it democratic to postpone the election any more than it had already been postponed. As a result, elections were called. The election of 1945 was the first election in ten years. [37] After five long years of fighting, the public did not want to go head first into another war, the one against Japan. Essentially, a vote for Winston Churchill was a vote for war.

In addition, the people did not want to return to the conditions of the depression before the war or the austerity endured throughout the war. Unfortunately for Churchill, Conservatives were in government during the depression preceding the war. As a result, the Conservative party was attributed the fault for the depression. [38] One of the five ministers of the Cabinet to lose

his seat after the election of 1945 later wrote, "*It was not Churchill who lost the 1945 election; it was the ghost of Neville Chamberlain.*" [39]

The Beveridge Report, which had come out in 1942, was also a contributing factor to Churchill's defeat. [40] This report had been based upon social surveys administered between the wars and proposed a government operated social security system at the end of the war, which the people very much supported. [41] At the time of its publication, the Labor members of the coalition government approved of the proposals mentioned in Beveridge's report while the Conservatives considered them far-fetched for a country that was still involved in the war. [42] On June 4, in Churchill's first campaign broadcast, he expressed his views towards socialism, which had been highly regarded by many Britons. [43] Furthermore, he alienated himself by stating that socialism would require a Gestapo, and essentially compared socialism to Nazism. This was a major slap in the face to supporters of the Labor party as they had, in essence, been called followers of the man that had caused so much turmoil in Europe. [44] His exact words regarding the possibility of turning to a socialist state were,

"I declare to you, from the bottom of my heart, that no Socialist system can be established without a political police. . . . They would have to fall back on some form of Gestapo, and no doubt very humanely directed in the first instance. And this would nip opinion in the bud; it would stop criticism as it reared its head, and would gather all the power to the supreme party and the party leaders, rising like stately pinnacles above their vast bureaucracies of Civil servants, no longer servants and no longer civil." [45]

Atlee's response to Churchill's broadcast could not have summed up the feelings of the people any better,

“[Churchill’s object was to make] the electors understand how great was the difference between Winston Churchill, the great leader in war of a united nation, and Mr. Churchill, the party Leader of the Conservatives. He feared lest those who had accepted his leadership in war might be tempted out of gratitude to follow him further. I thank him for having disillusioned them so thoroughly.” [46]

Churchill’s speech made the people assume that Churchill was against the proposals of the Beveridge Report, as it supported a socialist welfare state. However, according to Churchill, it was not that he was against Labor programs; he just *“hated intellectual arrogance of the left—of Bevan, Cripps, and Laski.”* [47] After having been booed by Labor party members during his last campaign speech, Churchill instructed his cabinet to arrange legislation for national insurance and health programs, as he realized that these programs were what the people wanted. [48] However, he did not publicize this, and as a result, the population had not been aware of this when they filled out their ballots. [49] The people however, needed assurance that their desires would be met when they went to decide who they would support. Had Churchill made more of a point to publicize the fact that he was willing to give the people what they wanted, he would have been much more likely to have won the 1945 election.

Another key factor was a very powerful political cartoon that had been published in the *Daily Mirror*, which at the time was the most prosperous paper in Britain and was very popular among the military. On VE day, a cartoon (see Appendix I) was published [50] that showed a tattered and beat up Allied soldier offering to the reader a slip of paper that said *“Victory and Peace in Europe.”* Under the picture was the phrase, *“Here you are! Don’t lose it again!”* [51] This cartoon was reprinted on the paper’s front page on the day of the general

election along with the advice that the best way to maintain the peace was to vote for the Labor party. [52]

This political cartoon was not the Labor party's only cartoon that had an impact. Where Churchill had the slogan (see Appendix II), "Help him finish the job!" [53] the Labor party had the slogan (see Appendix III), "Help them finish *their* jobs!" followed by "Give them homes and work!" [54] The Labor party's slogan appealed more to the people's emotions and was thus, more effective.

In addition, the military, the majority of which had experienced first-hand the horrors of war, was allowed to vote. Military members wanted change; they did not want to return to war immediately after they had finally finished the seemingly never ending war. As a result, the majority of those in the military voted in favor of the Labor party. [55]

Previously, the Labor party had not had much respect as it had held office only twice before it held office in 1945. However, public support grew for the party as a result of its vast influence throughout the coalition government as, most notably, Clement Atlee, the head of the labor party, had been the Deputy Prime Minister. [56] The paring together of newfound respect with the promise of giving to the people what they wanted gave the Labor Party its edge over Churchill, who was not acting in accordance with the will of the people.

In, "Let Us Face the Future," the Labor party's election manifesto, it was stated that,

“The Labour Party stands for freedom—for freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of the Press. . . . But there are certain so-called freedoms that Labour will not tolerate: freedom to exploit other people; freedom to pay poor wages and to push up prices for selfish profit; freedom to deprive the people of the means of living full, happy, healthy lives. The nation needs a tremendous overhaul, a great programme of modernisation and re-equipment of its homes, its factories and machinery, its schools, its social services. . . . The Labour Party is prepared to achieve it by drastic policies of replanning and by keeping a firm constructive hand on our whole productive machinery; the Labour Party will put the community first and the sectional interests of private business after.” [57]

The Labor Party had made a point to direct its goals towards rebuilding the society with social justice as the foundation. It sought to reform social services along with living, working, and educating conditions. It was not that the citizens had all become socialists, but rather, they recognized that practical needs of the people could, at that particular time, only be met in ways that had socialist tendencies. It was what the country needed to rebuild after the turmoil. [58] Even Churchill’s daughter remarked to him in private, *“There is no doubt that this common sharing and sacrifice was one of the strongest bonds that united us. So why, they say, cannot this common feeling of sacrifice be made to work as effectively in peace?”* [59] The Conservatives had been perceived as being suspicious of welfare reform and intervention on the state’s behalf. It was not due to a lack of gratitude for Churchill’s superb leadership, but rather a realization that his forte was in wartime relations and not in peacetime demands. As a result, the citizens voted in a way that would reflect the best interests of the country in its situation. [60] Furthermore the Labor Party targeted the Conservatives as being the reason for the Depression and reminded the

people of their misery in that period of time. [61] Before 1945, the Labor Party had generally appealed to the working class. At the time of the 1945 election, the Labor campaign, with its promises of an improved society, was alluring to all classes. The collectivist ideas did not seem so farfetched to the middle class, who normally would not have voted Labor, as a result of the wartime experiences. [62]

Domestic and foreign issues had come to the forefront, and Churchill's focus remained fixed upon his wartime success and the carrying out of another war. The people had gotten used to socialism because, in reality, the country had been socialist in all but name out of necessity during the war. It became evident to many citizens that the future after the Allied victory had much in store for them. Unfortunately for the people of Britain, Churchill did not have the same agenda. His goals were completely relevant and necessary during the war, but after the war, they were nothing more than extraneous. [63]

It was for all these reasons that, on July 26th, three weeks after the election of July 5th, it was announced that the Labor party had received 47.7% of the vote while the Conservatives had only won 39.7% of the vote. As a result, the Labor party was allotted 393 seats in the House of Commons while the Conservatives were granted only 210 seats, [64] when in 1935, the Conservatives had, an astronomical in comparison, 583 seats. [65] Because the Labor party held the majority of seats in the House of Commons, the leader of the Labor party, which was Clement Attlee, was to be the next Prime Minister of England. [66] Winston Churchill then resigned as prime minister on July 26, and his former Deputy Prime Minister took over the role of Prime Minister for the next five year. [67] On the eve of his resignation, Churchill gave a

concession statement to the BBC. Brian Gardner considered this statement to be “*perhaps the most gracious acceptance of democratic defeat in the English language.*” [68] The statement was,

The decision of the British people has been recorded in the votes counted today. I have therefore laid down the charge which was place upon me in darker times. I regret that I have not been permitted to finish my work against Japan....It only remains for me to express to the British people, for whom I have acted in these perilous years, my profound gratitude for the unflinching, unswerving support which they have given me during my task, and for the many expressions of kindness which they have shown towards their servant. [69]

In summation, it was not necessarily Churchill's wartime success that led to his downfall. The people were grateful for his tremendous leadership during the war but did not, however, feel that his leadership was reason enough to vote him back into office. The people wanted change, and it did not seem like Churchill was going to meet their needs and desires for reforms. Rather, it was his assumption that his wartime success would lead him to a majority that ultimately led him to his defeat. Because he assumed that his wartime heroism would be sufficient, he did not make much of an effort to conciliate the people through promising them what they wanted and working towards the necessary reforms to achieve giving the changes they longed for. Were he blatant about his conciliation to give the people what they wanted, Churchill would not have been impacted quite as profoundly as he was impacted by Chamberlain's lackluster reign. However, because this was not the case, Chamberlain's bad leadership, mixed with Churchill's lack of campaigning and stubbornness to not give in to social reforms, along with his utter

denunciation of all things socialist, ultimately caused him to not appeal to the majority of the country. If Churchill had put more effort into his campaign and on appealing to the wants and needs of the people instead of merely assuming that he was guaranteed to win, there is no doubt he would have won the election.

Appendix I



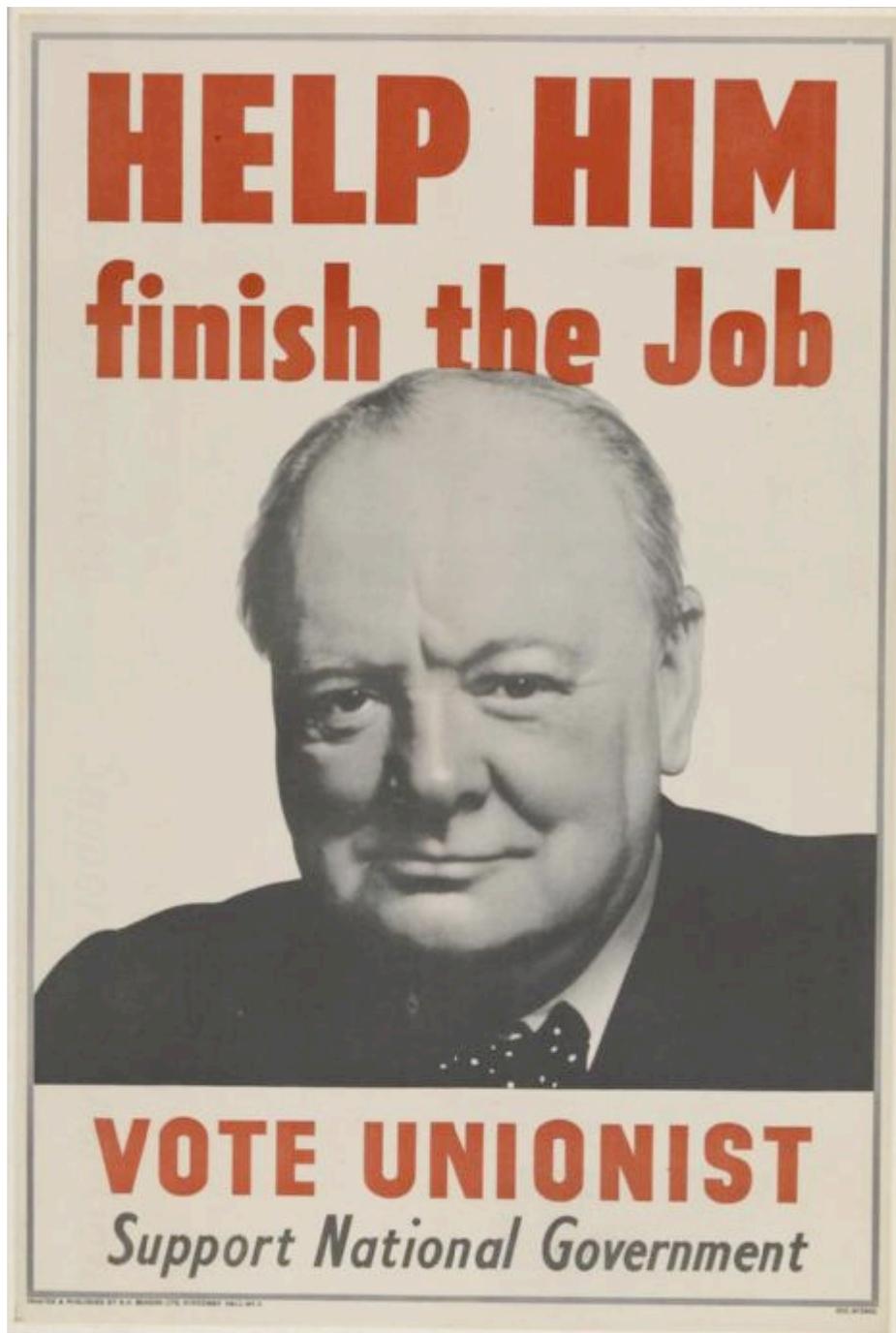
“Here you are, don’t lose it again.” [70]

Appendix II



"Help Them Finish Their Job." [71]

Appendix III



“Help Him Finish the Job” [72]

Notes

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