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SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL AS A LEADER

by

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"Leadership" is an ambiguous word and one that even now, many years after Hitler died in the Berlin bunker and Mussolini hung on a gallows in Milan, has not lost all its alarming connotations. Nor has the memory of "the genial leader" J.V. Stalin, grown any more sweet since his death and the candid revelations of his former colleagues were given to the world. It is a primary tribute to Sir Winston Churchill that we can think of him as a leader, think of him as embodying "leadership," without awakening in our minds any of these unpleasant and alarming memories. In him something was embodied that was very different from the ugly principle and practice from which the world has suffered so much.

Belief In Traditional Limitations

What is the difference? Partly, no doubt, it is that Sir Winston was like the old Roman office of dictatorship, for like the old Roman dictator, Sir Winston undertook that no ill

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Sir Winston was part of a long-established tradition of free government, that the office of Prime Minister was not that of a dictator, but was bound by traditional limitations and decencies. No doubt this is true and important, but it is worth noting that Sir Winston accepted the limitations, observed the decencies not out of mere necessity, but because such observance seemed to him the right, the only way of undertaking the salvation of his country in its moment of danger.

Never for a moment did he forget that he had his mandate from the House of Commons - and so from the people to whom he was responsible not only for the achievement of victory, but for the preservation of the old liberties of the land.

That Sir Winston was a loyal, devoted and obedient member of the House of Commons was the first thing to be noted about his leadership. It was the leadership of a man who was proud also to be a servant, to submit to what was often ignorant criticism, to the answering of what were often silly questions to being a "good House of Commons man."

An Example And A Contrast

In "time of the breaking of nations," this obedience (one hardly dares say docility) was an example and a contrast, an example to the British peoples, a contrast to the "leaders" who dictated from above, who knew no equals, no subordination to any settled system. It was in this sense that the leadership of Sir Winston was like the old Roman office of dictatorship, for like the old Roman dictator, Sir Winston undertook that no ill

should befall the Commonwealth and that its liberties should be preserved intact.

The next characteristic of this leadership was candor. He promised nothing but "blood, sweat and tears;" no easy victory, no paradise of plunder. He called out courage rather than demanded docility, and even quite timid persons found their hearts filled with new energy as they listened to that indomitable voice. Again, it was no matter of authoritarian leadership from above; it was a matter of a common effort, with common courage, common resolve, common

"Courage never to submit or yield: and what is else
Not to be overcome."

In inspiring this courage, this common confidence, Sir Winston called on all his great resources as an orator. Never has a democratic leader spoken with equal force to so many millions, including the many millions of the subdued nations of Europe and the many millions across the Atlantic who found in these brilliant phrases something much more important than phrases, the promise and proof of victory. But Sir Winston's oratory could not have been so effective had it not been so profoundly human. The contrast between his style, full of humor and scorn, but not of hate or hysteria, was not lost on the world. It represented a humane tradition as well as being the authentic voice of an indomitable leader.

An Inspiration To All

But leadership is not merely oratory, however admirable the oratory may be. It is action. From the beginning of his

premiership, Sir Winston, by tireless energy inspired all around him, and the inspiration he gave to those in contact with him spread downwards and outwards to every home, factory, battle station. In a war of unprecedented magnitude and novelty, he gave the impression of one ready to try everything, bound by no precedent, daunted by no novelty. That mistakes would be made, that was admitted; that disasters came, that was not concealed. But with the confidence bred of courage, the Prime Minister sought the ways in which victory could and would be won - and knew that in possibly extravagant novelties might lie the secret of victory.

Britain, the people felt, would not be defeated because of any blind clinging to routine. The general public knew little of friction, disagreement, disappointment; they knew only that an indefatigable chief was trying and proving all things.

They knew more than that. They knew that their leader cared deeply for them. The famous episode of a visit to a badly bombed part of London and the sight of the courage of the victims driving the Prime Minister to tears produced, in return, a gush of affectionate understanding among the survivors of a night of horror. The great leader cared for the cost of victory, for the endurance and suffering of humble people. Again, this was leadership in a free country, leadership of a free people.

Leadership worked both ways: leader and led exchanged courage, hope, endurance. And this exchange could not have taken place if there had not been in Sir Winston's actions, the visible

note of magnanimity. The cause was greater than the man, than any man; there was place for pride, but not for mere vanity.

Humor Even In the Darkest Hour

The leadership was personal, not merely official, but it was the leadership of a disciplined personality, of a great public servant. It was because of this magnanimity, this submission to the greatness of the cause, that Sir Winston was not only a leader of the British people or of the peoples of the Commonwealth, but of the free peoples of the world. In the darkest hour, his courage, humor, wit illustrated in the stories, many no doubt apocryphal, that clustered round his name, were among the chief assets of a cause in mortal danger confronted by leaders and states based on the "leadership principle" where humor, self-criticism, magnanimity were all forms of treason.

The contrast between the good and bad forms of leadership was blindingly clear, and in nothing made more clear than in the futile hatred and hysterical abuse provoked by the great leader who, in the darkest hour, never lost heart or hope or humor or a constant care for the common man and woman who had to endure so much. It took a very uncommon man to represent those suffering millions and win their deep and affectionate confidence.

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