

# Churchill was a hero, Tucker Carlson should get better guests

By Conrad Black

A minor historical controversy has been raging for a couple of weeks since Tucker Carlson had on his program a publicity-seeking historian of dubious credentials and questionable professional standards of research, Darryl Cooper, who claimed that Winston Churchill “was the chief villain of the Second World War.” His allegations were that Churchill “was primarily



The famed portrait of Winston Churchill taken in 1941 by Yousuf Karsh in Parliament. PHOTO BY YOUSUF KARSH

responsible for that war becoming what it did, something other than an invasion of Poland.” He also claims that the millions of Soviet prisoners of war who died in German captivity did so

because the Nazi leadership “had no plans for POWs.” He claimed that the invasion of Russia was the result of Hitler’s fear of an imminent attack upon Germany by Stalin. Cooper denounced Churchill for declining Hitler’s peace proposals prior to the blitzkrieg in the West in May 1940 and also after the fall of France, as “the war was over and the Germans had

won." Subsequent events indicate otherwise. Cooper solemnly declared that "Churchill wanted a war; he wanted to fight Germany... I resented Churchill so much because he kept the war going when he had no way to fight it, all he had were bombers." Astonishingly, for a historian whose views were aired before such a large audience, Cooper announced that Churchill's motive was based in his need for "redemption," claiming "Churchill was humiliated by his performance in the First World War." He went on to denounce Churchill as "childish" and a "psychopath," a Zionist, who was bankrupt and "bailed out by Zionists." All of this is rubbish.

This is what was known in the 19th century as "mere controversy," and is a practice engaged in by a number of historians, most disreputably by David Irving with his endlessly repeated theory that Hitler knew nothing of the Holocaust. But even serious historians engage in this practice, such as Correlli Barnett's claim that Napoleon was not a very competent general, and A.J.P. Taylor's claim that the western powers (though not Churchill, who was out of office), were chiefly responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War. Churchill's background prior to entering politics had been as a military academy graduate and garrison soldier, engaging in colonial wars, and as a war correspondent. He was knowledgeable of the history of war and interested in the evolution of strategy and of weapons. He was undoubtedly a more capable war leader than peacetime leader and given the stakes involved, it is not surprising that he found wartime more challenging and in some respects exciting than the paths of peace. Like a great many other people who have been engaged in military combat at all levels, the war years were, in retrospect, the good years. But he was a very human man who felt keenly the human cost of war and it was in expressing his condolences in war-time that he was at his greatest: his humanity, indomitability, and erudition conjoined.

Churchill was initially curious about Hitler and in his 1935 book, *Great Contemporaries*, he referred to the new German leader as someone about whom it was still possible to hope that he would be a constructive figure in the post-Great War resurrection of Germany. He warned in the 1930's against appeasement as a policy that would merely whet the appetites of Hitler and Mussolini and not deter them. He understood that Britain and France could not go to war to prevent the Sudetenlanders from becoming Germans if that was what they wished, (it was), but he was correct in wishing to extract more from Hitler in exchange for such concessions and objected to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain treating Munich as a diplomatic triumph and misapplying the famous and justified statement of Disraeli about the Congress of Berlin in 1878 that it was: "peace in our time." Churchill respected the Jews as a talented and much-wronged people. He briefly had a loan and took some financial advice from Bernard Baruch, but owed the Zionists nothing.

Obviously Churchill had nothing to do with extending the insouciant British and French guarantee of Poland in March, 1939. He was out of office and favoured closer discussions with Roosevelt and Stalin, who were anti-Nazi and were the only leaders of great powers of the time (apart from Hitler) who had any idea of what they were doing, and were set at the head of nations of great military and industrial strength. After war was declared, Churchill was brought into the government as First Lord of the Admiralty, the post that he had held at the outbreak of the First World War. It can't be said that he was completely blameless in the fiasco in Norway though it was not his plan, and he came perilously close to advocating direct reinforcements for Finland in its resistance to the Soviet Union: a gallant victim nation, but this was no time to blunder into war with Stalin as well as Hitler. Thereafter, Churchill correctly realized that it would ultimately be impossible to coexist with so satanically devious and psychotically bellicose a man as Hitler at the

head of so powerful nation as Germany. While the British army did not distinguish itself until late 1942, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy had won the Battles of Britain and of the Atlantic and had maintained control of British airspace and of the sea approaches to the U.K. and the supply lines with North America and the whole British Empire. On meeting him in his first days in office in May, 1940, Charles de Gaulle said : "I never doubted that led by such a fighter, Britain would never flinch."

After the decisive Allied victories in the Russian, North African, and Pacific theatres of Stalingrad, El Alamein, and Midway and Guadalcanal, when invasions of England and Australia were no longer possible for the Axis, Churchill's comparative position to Roosevelt and Stalin declined. They disposed of more military and economic strength than he did and the British Empire was a rickety political structure compared to the United States and even the USSR. Churchill was wary of the German army and Roosevelt had to recruit Stalin to assist him in ensuring that D-Day took place as early as June 1944. Churchill did not realize as Roosevelt did that the allies would move quickly inland from Normandy with overwhelming air superiority and that once they were across the Rhine, the Germans would continue to fight savagely in the east against the Russians where Geneva rules were not observed and prisoners were routinely massacred in huge numbers on both sides, and would give way comparatively easily in the West to the more humane occupation of the Anglo-Americans and French.

Hitler invaded Russia because Roosevelt had defined American neutrality as giving the British and Canadians anything they wanted and allowing them to pay for it whenever they could while extending American territorial waters in the Atlantic from three miles to 1800 miles, ordering the U.S. navy to attack on detection any German ship in that area, and occupying Iceland to assist in the anti-submarine war.

Hitler reasoned that he was going to be at war with the U.S.

eventually and it was worth the gamble to try and knock Russia out before that happened. Churchill was a romantic warrior and Roosevelt a grand strategist, half idealist and half cynic. They were a magnificent combination; from 1940 to approximately 1943 the entire future of democratic civilization rested on their shoulders alone. We were not only fortunate to have such great leaders, we were fortunate that they were men of such culture and eloquence that they substantially personified the civilization whose defense they were leading. This was well represented when Roosevelt sent Churchill the excerpt of the poem from Longfellow that Churchill read on a worldwide radio broadcast in 1941. It began "Sail on oh ship of state, sail on oh Union strong and great," and Churchill also read his reply, from Clough, ending "Westward look, the land is bright!" Both were heroes and the imputation to Churchill of villainy by an unserious historian is absurd and shameful. Tucker should know better than to have such riffraff on his program.

*First published in the [National Post](#)*