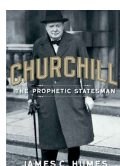


# Reviews

## Churchill: The Prophetic Statesman

By James C. Humes, Regnery Publishing Inc., USA \$ 27.95



James Humes, a brilliant speechwriter and adviser to a succession of Republican Presidents of the United States, has long been conspicuous in the extensive ranks of Churchill's American admirers. His knowledge and insights are widely acclaimed. There is much that can be learned from them on this side of the Atlantic. Humes met his hero in 1953 when he was an

exchange student attached to Stowe school. "Study history, study history," Churchill told him. "In history lie all the secrets of statecraft." This injunction, which the great man was fond of repeating to young people who came his way, reflected his well-known conviction, quoted by Humes, that "the longer you look back, the further you can look forward".

Churchill conducted his political life on the basis of this precept. Knowing far more about the past than any other statesman before or since, he made pronouncements about the future with firm assurance fortified by his own profound sense of historical destiny. "History for Churchill", writes Humes, "was a source of imagination about how the future would change the world... He intuited technological and social

**“ Churchill was the first political leader to take a sustained interest in science and technology ”**

change that no historical precedent would have suggested". In 1992 Humes discussed Churchill's world stature with Richard Nixon. The former President said "there's only one political leader in history who had his own crystal ball".

This fine, incisive short book shows how Churchill brought his unique powers of

foresight to bear on the great issues of the twentieth century. On his 25th birthday in 1899, he wrote that "the new century will witness great war". In 1911 he produced a long memorandum, dismissed by senior generals as "ridiculous and fantastic", which described the manner in which Germany could be expected to attack France in the event of war. "The balance of probability," wrote Churchill, "is that by the twentieth day the French armies will have been driven from the line of the Meuse and would be falling back on Paris and the south", but after another twenty days the German advance would at last be halted.

This is exactly what happened three years later: 41 days after the Germans attacked France in August 1914, they lost the Battle of the Marne, forcing them to resort to the trench warfare which made a decisive advantage for either side so hard to achieve—and led Churchill, impatient for victory, to devise the Gallipoli campaign. After such prescient judgement at this time, he was naturally swift to assume the task of warning his country about the grave threats that it faced from Nazi Germany in the 1930s and from the Soviet Union after 1945.

He had no doubts about the horrors of warfare that modern science would create. Looking forward from the 1920s, he asked: "Could not explosives even of a conventional type be guided automatically in flying machines by wireless or other rays, without a human pilot, in ceaseless procession upon a hostile city, arsenal, camp or dockyard?" Churchill was the first political leader to take a sustained interest in science and technology. In 1931 he anticipated a world in which nuclear power had become a great force for both good and ill.

On the domestic front Humes does not neglect Churchill's strong commitment to social reform. "I see little glory," he wrote in 1901, "in an Empire which can rule the waves but is unable to flush its sewers." Throughout his life he held firmly to the progressive views formed in early life. "We want to draw a line below which we will



not allow persons to live and labour, yet above which they can compete with all their manhood.” These sentiments, uttered in 1906, reappeared almost word for word in Conservative Party’s manifesto for the 1950 election. Churchill did much to recast the social policies of the Party in which he spent most of his career, but was never truly at home. “I’m a Liberal,” he said at the age of 87, “always have been.”

In peace and in war Britain was brilliantly served by Churchill’s foresight. The remarkable predictions that he made on so many different subjects recorded in this book included even the date of his own death. One morning in 1953 he said, “Today is the 24th of January. It’s the day my father died. It’s the day I shall die too” – and so he did 12 years later. Humes has found a new and compelling way of illuminating a theme in which interest will never be exhausted: the greatness of Winston Churchill. 🍷

Lord Lexden is a Conservative Peer and co-chairman of the Conservative History Group

### Where did all the Comrades go?

Radio 4, Presenter: Max Cotton,  
Producer Adam Bowen

**T**he reality for British communists has always been that Marxism has never really had the sort of traction in Britain that it managed to attract in many European countries. It has become something of a cliché to say that the Labour Party owed more to Methodism than to Marxism. But as with many clichés, it has a strong basis in truth.

The Communist Party of Great Britain, or the CPGB to the cognoscenti, was created in 1920 and wound itself up in 1991. This half-hour radio programme concerns itself primarily with the story of former members in the past 20 years.

Many, it is true, have had considerable influence in British politics, working as advisers for Labour ministers and even

for Tony Blair. The organisation itself has now become something called Unlock Democracy, which seems to be a collection of cuddly Guardianistas.

But the central theory of the programme is that communism, through people such as Geoff Mulgan and Charlie Leadbeater, actually started to secure real influence just as the party ceased to exist.

Actually, British communism often did have influence, usually through the trade union movement. Regions of certain big

“Many Communist Party figures displayed fine and noble principles”

unions were consistently communist-led as were some entire unions at certain times.

There were also communists and ex-communists who were prominent. John Cornford, for instance, who died a hero in Spain and became something of a legendary figure. A number of major political figures spent their youth in the CP usually because it was seen as the main bulwark against the spread of fascism. Denis Healey was a notable example.

The 1980s communists, upon whom this programme focused, were largely influenced by Eurocommunism. This strand of thought emerged in Italy within the Communist Party there under its famously charismatic leader, Berlinguer.

The key problem for Italian communists was that they consistently had the biggest and most popular party in Italy but always failed to win power. So the question was how could they expand their natural base beyond the working class?

This was a fair question and in Britain became a question of how Labour could do the same and attract swing voters.

However, in the pages of *Marxism Today* – the theoretical journal of the British CP – this developed into a wholesale flight from anything that smacked of Labour movement traditions.



Crowds gather in London's Trafalgar Square as Willie Gallacher, Communist MP, launched the party's election campaign

For instance, I can remember one particularly trivial article which poured scorn on the traditional British pub because it was insufficiently cosmopolitan. Or another which argued that unions had been made redundant by the advent of “a collective ethos in the workplace”.

Only people who live in a rarefied atmosphere removed from the real world of work could dream up such drivel.

It is true that many Communist Party figures displayed fine and noble principles, most notable in the struggle against fascism.

Nevertheless, the “democratic centralist” model on which the CP was run was certainly centralist but not democratic. Such introspective models tend to turn in on themselves and fall into the grip of small elites. Sadly, that was certainly the case with the CPGB. 🍷

John Cryer is the Labour MP for Leyton and Wanstead and a former journalist at the *Morning Star*