

History, The Cold War: Superpower relations between

1941-1991

Lesson 5 of 30

## **Worksheet**

**Did Churchill officially announce the beginning of the Cold War?**



# CHURCHILL AND THE 'IRON CURTAIN' SPEECH

In May 1945, Churchill announced **VE Day** and the end of war in Europe to huge crowds and was a national hero. In **July**, there was an election in the UK and Churchill's Conservative Party **lost the election**, meaning he was no longer Prime Minister of the United Kingdom but was still an important politician in the UK. Although he was **no longer the Prime Minister**, his role in WW2 meant that he still an important figure in, and able to influence, world affairs. In the Spring of 1946, Churchill went on holiday to America and on **5<sup>th</sup> March 1946**, Churchill was invited to Westminster College in **Fulton, Missouri in the United States** to speech to academics at the college about world affairs.



**President Truman was on the stage when Churchill made his speech** and listened carefully. It is also likely that, as the president was at the speech, and had invited him to America, and had secretly encouraged him, that Churchill had got Truman's approval for what he was going to say before he made the speech. **Churchill was worried by the expansionist activities of the Soviet Union and wanted the USA to take action against Stalin.** He was concerned that communist governments were being set up in Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. In his speech, he made it clear that he was giving his opinion and was not speaking in an official capacity but was **offering advice on the problems resulting from the end of the war** in what he called 'anxious and baffling times'.



## WHAT DID THE 'IRON CURTAIN' SPEECH SAY?

Churchill began his speech with **praise for the United States**, which he said stood “at the pinnacle of world power”. He then said there should be a **“special relationship”** between the United States and Great Britain—the great powers of the “English-speaking world”—and that they should **take the lead in running the world now the war was over**. Churchill **warned against the expansionism of the Soviet Union**. He talked about the threat of war and **tyranny** in his key point. He spoke about an **‘Iron Curtain’** that had descended across Eastern Europe and that there was “nothing which they (the Soviets) admire so much as strength, and there is nothing for which they have less respect than for military weakness.”



There was no physical barrier, the **'Iron Curtain'** was a **metaphor for the division of Europe into the democratic states of the West and the Communist states of the East.** Churchill believed that the Allies had spent six years fighting for the freedom from Fascism in Europe and that it was not right that half the continent should now have no freedom and be subject to Communist dictatorship and **tyranny.** The term **'Iron Curtain'** had been used as a **metaphor** since the 19th century, but Churchill used it in this speech to refer specifically to the **ideological, political, and military divide** created by the Soviet desire to create a buffer zone in Eastern Europe. It soon entered into Cold War vocabulary and policy.



# POLITICAL **CARTOON**, SOURCE ANALYSIS

**Cartoons** are drawings produced to express an opinion on political developments and world events. This **cartoon**, drawn the day after Churchill's speech, 6th March 1946 by Leslie Illingworth, was printed in the Daily Mail, a British newspaper.

The message of the **cartoon**, which we can understand by looking at its different elements, can give us an insight into British reaction to the **'Iron Curtain'** speech.



**'by order of Joe':** this is written on the iron curtain in the **cartoon**. Stalin's first name was Joseph and was known during the war as Uncle Joe as the Soviets were friendly allies. **Iron** is tough, hard to break or damage. A **curtain** hides or divides something. The cartoonist is saying that the iron curtain is designed to hide something and will be difficult to break down.

**Churchill crouched down:** he's looking under the iron curtain, or 'peeking' which perhaps suggests that he shouldn't be looking. He doesn't know what's going on in Eastern Europe because Stalin is paranoid and doesn't want the West to know what he is doing as he is suspicious and doesn't trust them. Churchill wants to know, because the West does not trust the Soviets either.



**Ruined building (top left):** this symbolizes the destruction of Europe during WW2 and the fact that Western Europe was not yet recovered. In contrast, Eastern Europe (behind the iron curtain) is seen as being well recovered and economically strong due to the **factories with smoke coming out of them.** This tells us that the West feared they were not as strong as the USSR.

**Message:** the cartoon is making a judgement on world affairs after Churchill's speech in the US. It clearly demonstrates the fears of the West. It shows that they blame Stalin and the Soviet Union for the divide of Europe as he has pursued an expansionist policy based on ideology. This has created the **'Iron Curtain'**.



## HOW DID THE WORLD REACT TO THE 'IRON CURTAIN' SPEECH?

The speech was very **controversial**. The speech was condemned by the Soviets, and Stalin even wrote a response to Churchill's comments, calling it **warmongering**, which means to **encourage and support war**. Truman and others in the US supported the speech (Truman called it 'admirable') as they had already decided, based on the Long Telegram they received in February, that the Soviet Union was determined to expand and that only a tough attitude would stop them. **Churchill's speech is significant** because, in explicitly **expressing the idea that Europe was divided along ideological lines**, and that it was Stalin's actions that did this, he was **publicly announcing the start of the Cold War** which had not happened before.



**Russian historians date the beginning of the Cold War from this speech.** Therefore, because of the world's reaction, it can be said that Churchill announced the beginning of the Cold War. Churchill had **highlighted the divide in Europe**, blamed the Soviets, and said that life was worse behind the **'Iron Curtain'**. This **led to the development of tension** between countries which had, only a year ago, been allies.



# Glossary

**Iron Curtain** - an ideological barrier, dividing Communist Eastern Europe from capitalist Western Europe

**Metaphor** - a figure of speech used to make a comparison between two things

**Controversial** - likely to cause different opinions and arguments

**Warmongering** - encouraging and supporting war and aggression between countries

**Tyranny** - cruel and oppressive government or rule

**VE day** - Victory in Europe day, 8th May 1945, the day that Nazi Germany surrendered and the war in Europe was over.

**Cartoon** - a drawing produced to express an opinion on political developments and world events



# Comprehension Questions

1. What does the phrase 'Iron Curtain' mean?
2. How did the Western powers react to the speech?
3. How did Stalin and the Soviets react to the speech?
4. How did the 'Iron Curtain' speech develop tension in the Cold War?
5. **Challenge question:** Did Churchill officially announce the beginning of the Cold War?

**Once you have completed your answers, resume the lesson to find out how you got on and hear some more.**

