

Over the Fence



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TIME FOR A BTTS SPEECH

New Zealand is overdue for a BTTS speech. Why the hesitation; we may even be unconsciously looking for one.

The most famous and historically significant BTTS speech was uttered by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons on 13 May 1940, just three days after his appointment as Prime Minister. It was the first of over fifty major speeches by Churchill as Prime Minister in the course of the War and arguably the most recalled.



Things looked grim for Britain and its Empire, indeed for the free and democratic world. The German Army had broken the French line and the numerically superior French Army had taken flight, or should that equally be 'fright'. The British Expeditionary Force was imperiled on the wrong side of the Channel, the miracle of Dunkirk unanticipated.

Churchill uttered the immortal words ***I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat.*** Thus he was telling the MPs, and the British people, the unvarnished truth. No pandering to false expectations, but nevertheless, at the same time the unqualified belief in final victory.



A classic image of Winston Churchill.

He went on, and I can't resist quoting these stirring words that still move the emotions 71 years later:

"We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, 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 terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. Let that be realised; no survival for the British Empire, no survival for all that the British Empire has stood for, no survival for the urge and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forward towards its goal. But I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, 'come then, let us go forward together with our united strength'."

Well, New Zealand isn't in anything like the same peril as Britain (and indeed New Zealand) was then, with the sound of rattling Panzer tracks and the clomp, clomp, clomp of marching jackboots approaching the gate, but nevertheless our economic position is dire, and thus our future wellbeing is in danger. It is true that our traditional exports are commanding historically good price levels, and thank goodness for that, but our fortunes have been

diminished by a recent series of tectonic, climatic and human disasters. If we don't adjust our expectations and accept the need for unpalatable sacrifice then we jeopardize our future. Borrowing \$300 million a week is completely unsustainable. The status quo of living so beyond our means simply won't do.

Still, it's hard to imagine our democratic leader, the Prime Minister, rallying Kiwis with stirring rhetoric; we're too cynical and too ready to apportion blame rather than accept the unvarnished truth. There was a time though when the Prime Minister did speak to the nation. But such a practice was pretty much destroyed by the introduction of a rule that for every minute the Prime Minister commandeered from the electronic media the Leader of the Opposition was entitled to equal time to reply, and any leader of a third party in Parliament, of which now there are a proliferation, was granted 50% of the time. So an act of leadership would inevitably become merely a continuation of the adversarial parliamentary process with its cheap political point scoring.

Incidentally, there is plenty of partisan politics in the United States, which currently is going through one of its periodic bizarre moods – just look at what the Tea Party wingnuts are saying about Obama – but the President is still the nation's leader and frequently addresses the nation as such. (Roosevelt, then in the early stages of radio, spoke weekly to the nation in the form of his 'fireside chat'.) The President's political opponents can find their own way of responding without the absurdity of it being enshrined in the rules.

Few Prime Ministers have had a better rapport with the public than John Key, but until we accept, whether or not we agree with his government or like the guy, that he is the democratic leader and responsible for our destiny then it's just unlikely to happen. Besides, my timing in promoting this is all wrong. With the second coming, or is this the third, of Don Brash such an approach would make such a call for economic sacrifice in the name of future solvency seem like his hidden hand in the act.

Okay, so let's forget it and keep on going down the gurgler (sigh).

GIVE US THE VOTE NORM, WE CAN ALWAYS GET THE GROG

Napier City councilor Bill Dalton has a regular comment on his website and he produces some pretty good straight-from-the-shoulder stuff. His last comment related to Hastings-Flaxmere ward councilor Henare O'Keefe fighting to prevent a new supermarket selling alcohol planned for the suburb. Henare is a lovely guy with a big heart and acts according to fine Christian principles. But here he is wrong.



(Image taken from TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADERS, Whitcombe & Tombs, 1969)

There are two things that youth will always outwit the elders in acquiring: sex and grog. These days, I'm not sure which is the easiest to come by. I heard an old timer say once: "the only thing I've got against the new morality is that it wasn't around when I was young". But let's stick to the grog. All that those who want it have to do is go into a Hastings or Napier supermarket, where they are most likely to work anyway (no travel required) and buy the stuff. So how will

Henare's assertion protect the youth of Flaxmere from alcohol abuse?

(In 1919 the US passed a constitutional amendment preventing the manufacture, importation, transport and sale of alcohol beverages through the entire country. It was a complete failure and in 1933 there was another amendment to legalise the stuff. New Zealand came within an ace of doing the same thing.)

This will likely can the prospect of a supermarket in Flaxmere, and in any case, what of all the responsible drinkers there? Why deny them the right to buy a bottle of wine or some beer when acquiring their groceries?

This is not to diminish the problem of alcohol abuse, especially with young people of both genders. Not for nothing is New Zealand known as "Grog's own country". We must seek a solution; one is education, and another, for me who drinks my share by the way, is higher excise duties.

AMERICAN POLITICAL SCENE

Those who follow the U S political scene will be perplexed that such a great and enlightened country can throw up serious aspirants to the Presidency who are such loons. The current Republican leading in the polls is Donald Trump. This guy is seriously wealthy, but he got away to a good start being born with a silver ladle in his mouth. Still, there seems some argument as to which he has had the most; wives or bankruptcies.

His recent play was to join the 'birthers' and claim Obama was not born in America, and therefore unqualified constitutionally to be president. This finally moved Obama to release his birth certificate. Trump then claimed that he was proud to have forced Obama to clear the matter up. This prompted a late night comedian to paraphrase Trump thus; "I'm proud that I have forced Obama to prove that over the last twelve months I have been talking a lot of crap".

But now the Republicans have got another problem. After accusing Obama variously of being a wimp, indecisive and inexperienced he has executed (actually the right word, executed) a brilliant operation to eliminate the evil Osama bin Laden. Okay, so he wasn't pulling the trigger, but you can guarantee if it had failed he would have been crucified. Such was the success that most Republicans have given the President the credit due. The exception was the intellectually diminished and politely diminishing Sarah Palin who made a speech giving *Bush the credit* and not even mentioning Obama's name!

THE TREES OF ... WHERE?

I came across these two pictures on websites over the last couple of weeks.



The first is a painting in the US Embassy in Beijing (ignore the people in front of it). It is obviously an American mountain scene.

The second looks remarkably similar. It has this caption: *Mount Cook and Lake Pukaki in New Zealand's South Island. Photo: Alamy.* Those familiar with our beautiful South Island mountain scenery will confirm this, but it may

have taken a second glance.

This raises the question of the role of exotics in the wider ecological landscape. Wilding trees, especially the rather plain pines, intruding into our regenerating native bush and native tussock lands is an ecological challenge we have not faced up to for too long, but the picture above looks pretty good with Douglas Fir and the deciduous Larch harmonizing together. But where will their spread end?

TWO DOG STORIES – ONE SHAGGY, ONE TRUE

Story One.

A Gisborne hill country farmer has a big huntaway called Jock, which he has trained to pick up a cast sheep, one that has such a heavy fleece that it can't regain its feet after lying down. On one occasion he is up on a ridge and way down on a flat paddock across a creek he sees a cast ewe. Just the job for Jock. "Go away out Jock!" is the command, and off goes Jock. The farmer directs him down the big hill, across the creek and when Jock spots the sheep he bounds over to it, but then stops, looks at it and just turns and heads back. "Pick it up Jock! Pick it up Jock!" yells the farmer, to no effect. So he has to go all the way down to the sheep, but immediately discovers Jock's problem; it has the neighbour's earmark!

Second one.

On a big dairy farm in the volcanic plateau there are so many cows that they are divided into herds of several hundred and milked in shifts. The first starts at 4.00 a m and so the milker has to head out at 2.30 to muster the cows in. But he has trained his dog to do it for him, assisted by modern electronic technology. At 2.30 a timer on the dog pen opens the gate. At the same time a timer opens the gate of the cow paddock. The dog heads out and musters the cows into the yard. The cow cocky has a sleep-in to 3.30. He arrives at the cow shed - oops, dairy - and the cows are all there ready to start milking.

One is suspect, the other true (well I believed it anyway) – you choose.

WELL SAID

One quote doing the rounds in the US following the death of Osama bin Laden is from Mark Twain:

"I've never wished a man dead, but I have read some obituaries with great pleasure."

LAST WORD

If you haven't already, don't forget to take a look at my website:

www.overthefence.org.nz.

And if you think a friend would like to read Over the Fence then feel free to forward it.

Cheers, Ewan Mac