

By the spring of 1940, Hitler had invaded much of Western Europe and Britain itself was threatened. King George VI gave Winston Churchill the task of forming a new administration to face this unprecedented crisis. On 13 May 1940, Winston Churchill made this speech to the House of Commons describing the dramatic future England was about to experience. There was no television so no one could see “live” what was happening at the House of Commons, but many families owned a radio and those that didn’t have one, could listen to the speech in pubs or neighbours’ houses. Millions of British people listened to the Prime Minister’s words, urging the whole country to stand together, to fight together and to defend their country. The speech reached everyone. The radio proved to be a formidable instrument of communication and resistance.

Mr Speaker, on Friday evening last I received from His Majesty¹ the mission to form a new administration. It was the evident will of Parliament and the nation that this should be conceived on the broadest possible basis and that it should include all parties. I have already completed the most important part of this task.

A war cabinet has been formed of five members, representing, with the Labour, Opposition, and Liberals, the unity of the nation. It was necessary that this should be done in one single day on account of the extreme urgency and rigour of events. Other key positions were filled yesterday. I am submitting a further list to the King tonight. I hope to complete the appointment of principal ministers during tomorrow. [...]

I now invite the House by a resolution to record its approval of the steps taken and declare its confidence in the new government.

The resolution:

‘That this House welcomes the formation of a government representing the united and inflexible resolve of the nation to prosecute the war with Germany to a victorious conclusion’.

Sir, to form an administration of this scale and complexity is a serious undertaking in itself. But we are in the preliminary phase of one of the greatest battles in history. We are in action at many other points – in Norway and in Holland – and we have to be prepared in the Mediterranean. The air battle is continuing, and many preparations have to be made here at home.

In this crisis I think I may be pardoned if I do not address the House at any length today, and I hope that any of my friends and colleagues or former colleagues who are affected² by the political reconstruction will make all allowances for any lack of ceremony with which it has been necessary to act.

I say to the House as I said to ministers who have joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil³, tears, and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many months of struggle and suffering.

You ask, what is our policy? I say it is to wage⁴ war by land, sea, and air. War with all our might and with all the strength God has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and 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 terrors – 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, the impulse of the ages, that mankind shall move forward toward his goal.

I take up my task in buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. I feel entitled at this juncture, at this time, to claim the aid of all and to say, ‘Come then, let us go forward together with our united strength’.

1. **Mr Speaker... His Majesty:** the Speaker is the president of the House of Commons; His Majesty refers to King George VI.

2. **affected:** interested, involved.

3. **toil:** labour, work.

4. **wage:** conduct.

Other suggestions:

- Communication as totalitarian propaganda: George Orwell, *1984* (1948), Part 3, chapter 2
- Absence of communication: Wole Soyinka, *Telephone Conversation* (1963)
- Social communication through poetry: Margaret Atwood, *The immigrants* (1970)
- Communication as memory: Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005), chapter 1
- Social media communication and loss of privacy: Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (2013), Book 1