

Highlights of Former President
Gerald R. Ford's address at
Westminister College, Fulton, Missouri
October 29, 1977

Three decades ago a leader of a great democracy, defeated and out of office for a year, came to this town to sound an alarm about Europe which rang around the world. I would not compare myself either in statesmanship or in eloquence to the man who made "Iron Curtain" part of the global language. But I will not yield to Winston Churchill or anyone else my love of freedom. Indeed it is devotion to democracy that compels me to speak out today just as he did in March 1946. For the situation in Europe, while different, is no less severe.

From the shores of the Adriatic to those of the Atlantic, a new specter of Communist control hovers over the countries of Western Europe. Lisbon, Paris, Madrid, Rome--all of the parliaments in these capitals--now confront the clutch of Communist power.

Yet I do not find such Communist domination to be inevitable. I draw hope from the lesson of Fulton, when Winston Churchill, by daring to tell the truth, steeled the will of the West.

If we can strip from the Euro-Communists their deceit of democratic pretensions, the forces of freedom will win. If we can be as ruthless in telling the truth about the Euro-Communists as they are in suppressing it, the cause of democracy will live.

For Euro-Communism, is not as their propagandists say, "Communism with a human face." It is Stalinism in a mask and tyranny in disguise.

But as Western Europe readies for this anti-democratic threat, America must respond with similar resolve. From the Presidency of Truman to that of my own, every administration has manifested its unequivocal opposition to the accession of Communist governments.

Is there a changed attitude now taking place in our country? Communist labor leaders, over objections of George Meany and others, have now been extended the opportunity to come to the United States. Recently, some in authority have subtly planted the idea that the U. S. would have little difficulty in getting along with Communist leaders holding key ministries of, say, Italy and France.

I think I reflect the overwhelming will of the American people when I say that such an impression is utterly false. All Americans love freedom and will stand up for those friends of freedom.

The America that enacted the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine has not changed. The America that has encouraged and supported the idea of the European Community is not wavering. The America that is still a member of N.A.T.O. remains steadfast.

This will of our people must be manifested in the words of its leaders. Any ambiguity by them leaves the impression that we expect the Communists to eventually win. Communism is a form of religion which is fueled by belief in its own inevitability. If the United States does not communicate its opposition at the highest level, we may make it easier for the Communists to gain power. More important than the condition of human rights in those dictatorships which have abolished them is the preservation of those rights in those nations that still have them.

In Western Europe today--from the Straits of Dover off Normandy to the Straits of Messina at Sicily--a shadow looms over democracy. The Parliaments of Italy, Portugal, and France face the dark possibility of take-over by one party--a party that is anti-democratic in purpose and totalitarian in procedure--a party rendered more dimly dangerous by its intimate association with fellow party members all over the world. For the Communist Party of Russia, Eastern and Western Europe are as one in their aim to destroy N.A.T.O., break up the Common Market and subvert other free institutions.

But if lovers of liberty attack the hypocrisy of the Euro-communists, the lights of free elections and assembly will not be eclipsed. If the defenders of freedom unmask the sham of Communist pretensions to democracy, the beacons of certain parliaments will not be extinguished.

In 1914, a leader of the British parliament said, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

If we in the West react with indifference instead of resolve, I can see possibly descending upon the parliaments of Lisbon, Madrid, Rome, and Paris the death-shroud of one-party rule. If we are ambiguous instead of forthright, I could see covering those capitals of Portugal, Spain, Italy, and France a canopy of Tyranny.

I am now 63 years old. If any of the lights of those parliaments is snuffed out, I will not see them turned on again in my lifetime.