

Substantial Disruption



The Cowardly Lion

By Mike Tully

"Nothing gives a fearful man more courage than another's fear."

— Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*

Upon Winston Churchill's passing in 1965, Bill Mauldin drew a [famous cartoon](#) of a tearful lion, symbolizing the late Prime Minister, a lion-like force of nature and politics. In a [radio speech](#) in 1941, Churchill invoked the animal spirits of his nation and ours as America considered joining Great Britain in the Second World War. "And now the old lion," he said, "with her lion cubs at her side stands alone against hunters who are armed with deadly weapons and impelled by desperate and destructive rage." A Churchill biography is entitled, "[The Last Lion](#)," an analysis of his speeches is entitled "[The Roar of the Lion](#)."

Donald Trump wants to be like Churchill, whom he called an "unbelievable leader" in an [interview](#) with Larry King. One of Trump's first acts was to [return a bust of Churchill](#) to the Oval Office. Trump and Mike Huckabee, a sycophant who spawned Trump's [designated liar](#), were inspired by the movie, "[Darkest Hour](#)," which led Trump to [request a tour](#) of Churchill's private bunker. [Huckabee tweeted](#), "in @realDonaldTrump we hava Churchill." That comment came a day after Christmas; perhaps it was the eggnog talking. Members of Parliament were not amused by the comparison. "Churchill served in army & led world to beat fascism," tweeted Ian Austin. "Chicken Trump backs racists & dodged draft with bad foot!" Alex Sobel tweeted, "Churchill fought Nazis rather than repeated (or retweeted) them." Comparing Trump to Churchill is like comparing Pee Wee Herman to Hercules.

Trump so admires Churchill that he tries to look like him. The [New York Times reported](#) Trump "wanted to look dour, and vetoed any campaign imagery that so much as hinted at weakness." Trump aides said that's "why every self-selected snapshot — down to the squinty-eyed scowl attached to his Twitter account — features a tough-guy sourpuss." Trump said the look he was going for was "like Churchill." The [Daily Mail suggested](#) having the Churchill bust nearby helps Trump maintain the look, "with the proximity to his own desk allowing him to practice the downcast frown and furrowed brow favored by the former leader of the United Kingdom." Although his "downcast frown" suggests gastric distress, Trump sees Churchill in the mirror. It must make him crazy that the rest of us see [Alec Baldwin](#).

Donald Trump is a con man, grifter, and narcissist who cheats on his wives, but these things are not the primary danger in his presidency. Trump's presidency is dangerous because he is a coward. His attempt to be like Churchill is a sad delusion. "Churchill," noted the [Daily Mail](#), "was a wartime hero, a lifelong politician, a writer, a painter, a loyal husband and a celebrated orator whose most famous speech was a passionate denouncement of the policies and politics of Russia at the start of the Cold War." Trump, the article notes, is none of these.

Trump built his reputation as a TV tough guy telling people, “You’re fired,” but his courage winked out with the Klieg lights. He doesn’t have the courage to fire people to their face, as noted in a [BBC News article](#) focused on, among others, the dismissals of James Comey and Rex Tillerson. Noting Trump’s pattern of having subordinates conduct firings, Georgetown University Professor Michael McDermott told the BBC, “I can't think of any business, organisation or government entity that has any kind of oversight that would tolerate this kind of behaviour in their chief executive officer.” Michael Kruse, [writing in Politico](#) in 2016, noted Trump’s unwillingness to fire employees personally was characteristic. “I have never heard him say the words ‘You’re fired’ to anyone,” said a former executive.

Kruse authored a follow-up entitled, [“He Pretty Much Gave In to Whatever They Asked For,”](#) a history that belies Trump’s claim to be a great negotiator. For example, Trump demanded \$1 million per episode of “The Apprentice.” Jeff Zucker, former head of NBC, said Trump was paid \$60,000 per episode. “We ended up paying him what we wanted to pay him.”

In 2016, the *Atlantic’s* Peter Beinart [wrote an article](#) entitled, “The Cowardice of Donald Trump,” noting Trump vilified certain groups in public, but not to their face. “Trump has illustrated something important about the anti-politically correct,” he wrote. “They’re most comfortable confronting PC orthodoxy when the people they’re confronting aren’t around.”

Trump doesn’t need to meet some victims personally: desperate immigrants seeking asylum or safety and security for their family. Debbie McGoldrick, [writing for Irish Central](#), noted the similarity between Trump’s demonization of Hispanic immigrants and the history of Irish immigrants. “President Trump is basing his re-election and midterm elections pitch directly on the old nativist war cry,” she wrote. “Instead of the Irish being demonized it is Hispanics. Somebody must be blamed.” Fear is Trump’s political alchemy; he distills cravenness into an elixir for the fearful and unschooled. His vision of governance is a slow-motion stampede, disregarding a stampede’s disdain for speed limits.

Cowardice places a nation in danger. Trump was intimidated by Kim Jong-un and struck [what Vox refers to](#) as “a shockingly weak deal with North Korea.” While Trump proclaims the [North Korean nuclear threat is over](#), the Koreans are [increasing nuclear production](#). The coward was played. What of the upcoming summit with Vladimir Putin? A former Fox News military expert [told CNN](#) Putin has “some kind of grip on Trump.” The issue isn’t whether the craven negotiator will make concessions, but how much damage will be done when he does.

Trump’s most effective product is fearfulness. He lives in fear, preaches fear, peddles fear, and negotiates fearfully. To paraphrase FDR, “the only thing we have to fear is Trump himself.”